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# INTELLECTUAL VAGABONDAGE

*An Apology for the Intelligentsia*

BY

FLOYD DELL

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INTELLECTUAL VAGABONDAGE
— B —
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

l, Floyd. Intellectual vagabondage, an apology for the intelligentsia (Doran's modern readers' bookshelf) N.Y. Doran,1926. 261p. $1.25.

he first part of this little book is a quasi-historical study of the relation veen life and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The nd part is "a spiritual autobiography of my own generation in its ary and social aspects," an apology for the younger generation of ern writers to which Mr. Dell belongs. Egotism, he says, is the only ude left them which is at all compatible with their inherited spiritual kruptcy.

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TO MY SON

ANTHONY

# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

*Of all human ambitions an open mind eagerly expectant of new discoveries and ready to remold convictions in the light of added knowledge and dispelled ignorances and misapprehensions, is the noblest, the rarest and the most difficult to achieve.*

JAMES HARVEY ROBINSON, in *"The Humanizing of Knowledge."*

It is the purpose of DORAN'S MODERN READERS' BOOKSHELF to bring together in brief, stimulating form a group of books that will be fresh appraisals of many things that interest modern men and women. Much of History, Literature, Biography and Science is of intense fascination for readers to-day and is lost to them by reason of being surrounded by a forbidding and meticulous scholarship.

These books are designed to be simple, short, authoritative, and such as would arouse the

interest of intelligent readers. As nearly as possible they will be intended, in Professor Robinson's words quoted above, "to remold convictions in the light of added knowledge."

This "adding of knowledge" and a widespread eagerness for it are two of the chief characteristics of our time. Never before, probably, has there been so great a desire to know, or so many exciting discoveries of truth of one sort or another. Knowledge and the quest for it has now about it the glamour of an adventure. To the quickening of this spirit in our day DORAN'S MODERN READERS' BOOKSHELF hopes to contribute.

In addition to the volumes announced here others are in preparation for early publication. The Editor will welcome suggestions for the BOOKSHELF and will be glad to consider any manuscripts suitable for inclusion.

S. D.

# PREFACE

This book, which begins with a brief survey and explanation of certain eighteenth- and nineteenth-century attitudes toward life, held by the intellectual class and exemplified in its favorite literature, goes on to give a somewhat more elaborate account of the attitudes of that same class during my own lifetime. It is, though it may not seem to be so, a plea in defense of that generation of intelligent, sensitive and more or less creative young people to which I and most of my friends belong. We are young at least in the sense that we have only recently begun to achieve utterance, through our own representative writers and artists, of our feelings and ideas about life. But it is a candid defense, and so it may appear to be actually an attack. It remains to be seen how much this generation, with all its love of candor, will relish such a defense—a defense which deliberately attempts to expose

our characteristic weaknesses, to uncover our idiosyncratic follies to whatever ridicule they may deserve, and even to disclose what may seem to be shameful and pitiful secrets, of however impersonal a sort. The objection is that these disclosures must perforce be made in the scornful gaze of people who seem never to have been young, never to have dared to think anything foolish themselves; they have all along suspected the worst of us, and these disclosures will merely serve as confirmation of their own self-righteousness.

But there are others, young people of a generation now growing up, boys and girls who ought to know the truth about us. It might seem that our favorite literature—the literature which we as an influential class of readers have brought into existence by our demand and celebrated by our praise—leaves nothing to be desired in this direction. But this literature, created to medicine our own pains, requires some explanation if it is to be at all understood by the younger generation that treads upon our heels. For this literature, such of it as is not immediately forgotten, will become a

part of that intellectual and artistic inheritance which the past hands on to the future and in which the future finds so little that it really wants. These young people are likely to feel that there is something peculiarly queer about our contribution to their happiness. They will be perhaps less ignorant than we once were about life, perhaps less bewildered and helpless in facing it; hungry for beauty, and eager for the words which can (as words sometimes miraculously do) awake the mind's profoundest interests; impatient of falsehoods and hypocrisies and concealments; but they will want to have life interpreted for them in books, they will seek in literature most of all for large and significant patterns of meaning and purpose, to apply imaginatively and experimentally to the chaos of inward impulses and outward circumstances which they will have begun fearfully and courageously to explore for themselves. They will turn to our generation's books, among others those books in which the writers whom we, in our time, elected as persons with something to say, have presumably set down their (and our) most important dis-

coveries about life. What will they think of the record which we have left them of mere pain, chagrin, disgust, cynicism, defeat, and failure?

Suppose, in the fashion that youth has, in certain periods, of taking such things as literature seriously, they complain that our favorite writers have failed to give them beauty, stimulus, help, and wisdom? We could of course reply that at least our writers had told them no lies about life; that they had not concealed any of its ugliness and pain; that they had not pretended to believe in ideals they knew to be false. But these young people will have begun life somewhat differently from ourselves, in a vastly different world from the world of our childhood; their life-needs will be different from ours. They will need less to be disillusioned, because they will not have been told quite so many lies as we were. They will be ready to formulate new ideals, and they will be weary of a literary sincerity which in its effort to avoid falsehood merely represents life as a hopeless muddle. Can the literature which we as an intellectual class evoked to

meet our own special needs be of use to the young people who are now growing up, help them to understand life so as to live it in larger, freer, braver, more beautiful and significant ways than it was lived in the past? Scarcely. That was not the task which we preferred to set for our writers:

Judged by such a standard, the most characteristic literature of our generation will have failed. And to such a reproach, no defense will suffice which does not attempt to tell the whole truth about our generation by way of explanation and apology.

This is, then, such an attempt. But first, before trying (in Part Two) to look squarely at ourselves, the intelligentsia of a particular period in the world's history, let us look (in Part One) at the rôle which the intelligentsia has played in times past, and at the relations which exist between life and literature. We shall find in historical circumstances some reason for our failure.

# CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE . . . . . ix

## *Part One*

## LITERATURE AND THE MACHINE AGE

CHAPTER

I LITERATURE AND LIFE . . . . . 21

*Why Some People Read Other People's Books*

II ROBINSON CRUSOE . . . . . 26

*The Desert-Island Fantasy—The Failure of Columbus—The Utopia of the Bourgeoisie—Rousseau on the Pioneer.*

III LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY UTOPIANISM . . . . . 35

*The Wish to Go Down on All Fours—The Noble Savage—The Age of Reason—Voltaire on the Merchant Class—Natural Law and Order—The Revolt of the Bourgeoisie.*

IV EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY DESPAIR 47

*The Byronic Mood—The Reign of Terror—The Man on Horseback—Literary Reactions.*

CHAPTER PAGE

V BACK TO THE MIDDLE AGES! . . . 58

*The Poets Leave England—"Freedom, Thy Banner, Torn but Flying"—Two Victorian Poets—Literary Grand Opera—A Victorian Prophet—A Victorian Critic.*

VI THE DARWINIAN CONTROVERSY . . 78

*The Tong-War Between Religion and Science—Popular Darwinism—"Nature Red in Tooth and Claw"—"God's in His Heaven, All's Right with the World"—Darwinism in Fiction and Poetry.*

VII THIS WAY TO THE IVORY TOWER! . . 89

*Medievalism in Politics, Literature and Art—The Esthetes—Grub Street and Guinevere—Life as a Succession of Exquisite Sensations—"Épater le Bourgeois"—Debacle.*

## *Part Two*

## A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MY OWN GENERATION IN ITS LITERARY AND SOCIAL ASPECTS

I YOUTH'S PILGRIMAGE . . . . . 105

*Picking Up the Pieces—Science and Jules Verne—Religion and Bob Ingersoll—American Rebels—"Freedom,* to *What?"*

II WE STOP AT A PERSIAN TAVERN . . 119

*Gospels for Youth—Darwinian Determinism with Vine-leaves in Its Hair.*

CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| III | WE ATTEND AN IBSEN PLAY . . . | 129 |
| | *Modern Young Women—The Girl and the Machine—The Glorious Playfellow.* | |
| IV | WE RALLY ROUND THE SOAP-BOX . . | 143 |
| | *A Step at a Time—"Let the Nation Own the Trusts"—Anarchists at Play—The Ego and Its Own—"No Gods, no Kings, no Jealousies!"* | |
| V | WE FALL IN LOVE . . . . . | 161 |
| | *Modern Courtship—The Problem of the Home—Free Women—The Baby Question—The Scared Young Male Idealist.* | |
| VI | WE BECOME JOYOUS VAGABONDS . . | 176 |
| | *"For to Admire and for to See"—The Joys of the Road—Playing at Life—"I Have Been Faithful to Thee, Cynara, in My Fashion."* | |
| VII | WE ACQUIRE THE DETACHED ATTITUDE | 190 |
| | *Merely Onlookers—Life As a Tragic Circus—The Indifference of the Artist—Nocturnes and Arrangements—Life As Meaningless Accident—George Moore and the Pyramids—Flowers of Sickness.* | |
| VIII | WE (ALMOST) DIE FOR ART . . . | 207 |
| | *Goethe, Revised—Enamels and Cameos—Martyrs of Art—The Story of Park Barnitz—The Last Words of Dudebat.* | |
| IX | WE BECOME SERVANTS OF THE FUTURE | 222 |
| | *The End of the World—The Heroes of H. G. Wells—Bernard Shaw As the King's Jester—Realities vs. Dreams.* | |

CHAPTER PAGE

X INTELLECTUAL SHELL-SHOCK . . 235

*Résumé—War and Peace—The Clock Turns Backward—The Rejection of "Meanings"—Dabbling in Chaos—The 'Orrors of the "Unconscious"—The Tramp's Revenge—The Infantile View of Life—Russia—"Duty"—The Hungry Sheep—The Liquidation of the "Freedom" Movement—A Still Younger Generation.*

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## Chapter I

# *Literature and Life*

### WHY SOME PEOPLE READ OTHER PEOPLE'S BOOKS

LITERATURE is in one of its aspects an argument—about the world, and the gods, and life, and death, and the destiny of man. It is conducted endlessly in prose and poetry, fiction and drama and essay—and it tends now to one conclusion and now to another, as the world's readers wish to be persuaded of this or that opinion.

These readers participate in the argument by their applause. It is their applause that gives significance to writers and books. A book is not important because it was written by the illustrious Soandso; no, but rather is Soandso illustrious because he has said something that anonymous thousands wanted to hear. What was it that Voltaire's enemy re-

marked of him, not knowing what high praise it was? "Voltaire is the first man in the world at writing down what other people have thought."

A book, then, reveals to us what large numbers of people have felt about the world. They may not have been willing to acknowledge such feelings as their own; they may not even have been consciously aware of having such feelings; and they were probably not able to express such feelings intelligibly, even if they were willing to do so. They are, in fact, readers, rather than writers, because they to some extent lack the candor, the courage, or the ability, to express in writing their feelings about life.

A significant writer is a person whose conscious emotions correspond to the deep unexpressed feelings of others, and whose candor and courage and sheer writing ability are adequate to the task of expressing these feelings, so that he becomes their spokesman. He may not know that he is speaking for these others; he may scorn these others: but if it should chance that he is actually speaking only for

himself, he may have immense candor and courage and sheer writing ability, and yet remain unrecognized—until a public comes into existence that needs him for a spokesman. Depend upon it, if our Great Writers had chanced to express what nobody but themselves had felt, we should never have heard of them. It is because they have spoken for the mute inglorious many that we know of their existence; and it is the extent to which they speak for *us*, that we can ratify the judgment which has pronounced them great.

Whom, then, did these great writers speak for? And to what extent do they still speak for us? That is the nature of our preliminary inquiry, though it deals only with one small portion of the world's literature—the part which, as constituting our immediate intellectual background, seems most nearly to concern us.

Such an inquiry, of course, turns aside from the path of esthetic criticism. Doubtless it is important to determine when and why writing is good. Yet it must be said that the attempt to understand literary values in the light of

current esthetic theory has so far been no great success. There is, to be sure, a difference between

*"Magic casements opening on the foam"*

and

*"A Mr. Wilkinson, a clergyman."*

But just what this difference is, aside from the fact that we happen to consider magic casements beautiful and clergymen rather ridiculous, the estheticians have not been quite able to determine. So we may take our leave of pure esthetics, and consider the question of why such things as magic casements are considered beautiful and such things as clergymen ridiculous—social judgments merely, which time may reverse.

Literature is, for the purpose of this inquiry, a record of the significant stages in the history of what men and women have thought and felt about the world in which they lived. It is a symptom of their attitude toward life. It is a testimony to the beauty and meaning—or the

ugliness and meaninglessness—of inward impulses and outward institutions. It is a series of interpretations of man's endless struggle with his environment. . . . The struggle endures; but the environment changes, and literature reflects that change—directly in some instances, and again in strange symbols and fantasies and fictions. But whether in prose or poetry, in direct statement or in the esoteric language of fancy, it mirrors the spiritual attitude, toward historical and economic circumstances, of vast questioning bewildered multitudes

## Chapter II

# *Robinson Crusoe*

THE DESERT-ISLAND FANTASY—THE FAILURE OF COLUMBUS—THE UTOPIA OF THE BOURGEOISIE—ROUSSEAU ON THE PIONEER

LET us begin with "Robinson Crusoe," and attempt to determine the secret of the spell which it cast over the imaginations of its eighteenth-century readers. We have all read it, and it should not be difficult for us to guess why it was popular.

True, it was as children that we ourselves read and enjoyed this book. But it is nevertheless possible that our own childish enjoyment can furnish us a clew to the adult enthusiasm with which it was read by our great-great-great-great-grandfathers.

As children, we found in "Robinson Crusoe" a world of our own. We were growing up in the midst of a complex adult civilization that

we resented, we were forced to obey rules we could not understand, we suffered pain and humiliation in conflicts with the established authorities; and it was with relief that we escaped to Crusoe's island, where we were monarch of all we surveyed. We lived in imagination Crusoe's life, and our cramped egotism found free scope in the creation of a world after our own fancy. We did not feel lost and helpless; we felt happy. We built a house, tamed the wild animals, made ourselves clothing from their skins, and found food to eat. We learned in such play to believe that we were self-sufficient and all-conquering. We learned that the individual is by right the master of his environment, and not its helpless victim. We found, in short, reassurance as to our individual significance, in this fantasy of mastery over the realm of nature.

What did the eighteenth century find in "Robinson Crusoe"? Something of the very same sort. . . . But to make that clear, we must first of all consider the consequences of the failure of Columbus.

Columbus had failed to discover a new route to the Golden East. And that failure, as it chanced, spelled the doom of feudal empire in Europe, and the rise of a new social order. . . . For feudal empire in Europe was broke—dead broke. And there was no hope for it, except in the conquest of the Golden East. But across the Bosphorus, between hungry Europe and the Golden East, lay the barrier of a militant Mohammedan empire, which two centuries of Crusades had failed to dislodge—and this barrier effectively protected, in that direction, the riches of China and India (so gorgeously reported by Marco Polo and other travelers) from the ravages of Christian noblemen. Columbus, at this point, appeared with a new and splendid idea—that of entering the Land of Gold by its unprotected back door! . . . But, alas, the land to which the gentlemen of Spain trooped so eagerly, when Columbus had shown the way, was no Eldorado—it was merely America, a land of savages, and of deserts in which Spanish gentlemen died like dogs. To be sure, there was gold in Mexico and Peru. The Spanish gentlemen took that,

and for a time Spain flourished. But the gold being spent, Spain decayed; and the Christian noblemen of Europe faced this barren continent with anger and disgust. They had no use for America!

Yet there were people in Europe who did have use for America. These were the people who were at odds with feudal institutions and traditions. They were interested in commerce and manufacture, and they resented the restrictions which the decaying feudal scheme put upon their activities. They presently, in more than one country, broke the bonds of that medieval Christianity which hampered the natural development of trade. Chief of the nations in which this trading class had gained a measure of freedom from medieval restrictions was Protestant England; and it was the Protestant English who now became foremost in settling the new continent.

To the bourgeoisie the existence of America opened new horizons. It enabled them to envisage in imagination a different kind of world, free from feudal restrictions, in which they could do things to suit themselves.

It was at first a merely imaginative release which America afforded them. Grants of land in the new continent were made by the king to his favorite noblemen; governors with authority from the king were set to rule over these new provinces—all the paraphernalia of the dying feudal world was transplanted to the American wilderness. With the exception of a few colonies founded on sectarian lines by the more fanatical of the new Protestant sects, there was no sign of the coming into existence of a new social order. And yet, behind this superficial adherence to medieval form, there was growing up a vast belief in America as a New World, different from the Old World in its possibilities—a Utopia upon which men's secret hopes were fixed.

The conditions of pioneer life involved almost inevitably a repudiation of the feudal scheme. When Captain John Smith, in a colony hard pressed by hunger, gave orders that he who did not work should not eat, he abrogated the whole sacred medieval tradition of class-duties and class-privileges. A man, in conflict with elemental nature, could not re-

main noble or commoner, he became simply *a man*. That idea, coming to people weary of class restrictions, fascinated the imagination.

It was a revolutionary idea. It implied that a man could do his own fighting, his own plowing, his own praying, his own governing —instead of dividing these functions among noble and peasant and priest and king.

It was early in the eighteenth century when this idea was first expressed in a realistic prose fantasy by a capable man of letters. The book, "Robinson Crusoe," became the most famous book of its time.

It gathered up into a tale of adventure and triumph all these wistful hopes of the young trading class, so like our own childish desires for freedom and opportunity. It gave them the same reassurances. It expressed the gospel of individualism. . . . So we may gather from the testimony of Jean Jacques Rousseau—whose impassioned arguments on behalf of freedom so deeply impressed the thought of his time, and whose philosophy was confessedly inspired in some sense by this very book.

Rousseau, in the latter half of the eighteenth

century, was foremost among those who predicted a dissolution of the lingering and decaying medieval scheme of society. "We are approaching a state of crisis and a century of revolution," he wrote. His chosen task was the work of teaching the nature of the coming society, and of preparing men to live in it. He expected a society in which the old class-duties and class-privileges would be abolished, and the individual freed from his ancient bondage. In his "Émile," an essay on education, he proposed that the educational process should be precisely a preparation of youth for lives of individual rather than class significance. And in this essay he paid his respects to a book which is, he declared, "the happiest treatise on natural education." "This treatise," he goes on to say, "shall be the first book which my Émile will read; and for a long time it will of itself constitute his whole library, and will always hold a distinguished place in it. It shall be the text upon which all our conversations on the natural sciences will merely serve as a commentary. During our progress it will constitute a test of the state of our judgment; and

as long as our taste is not corrupted, the reading of it will always please us.

"What then," Rousseau asks, "is this wonderful book? Is it Aristotle? Is it Pliny? Is it Buffon? No; it is 'Robinson Crusoe.'

"Robinson Crusoe," he continues, "on his island, alone, deprived of the assistance of his fellows and of the instruments of all the arts, yet providing for his own subsistence and preservation, and procuring for himself a state of comparative comfort—here is a theme interesting to every age, and one which may be made agreeable to children in a thousand ways." And he adds: "The surest way of rising above prejudices, and of ordering our judgments in accordance with the true relations of things, is to *put ourselves in the place of an isolated man, and to judge of everything as such a man must judge, according to its real utility.*"

That is to say, one has only to look at things from the point of view of the pioneer, and the absurdity of the feudal-medieval scheme of civilization is at once apparent! "Robinson Crusoe" taught our forefathers to look at things from the pioneer point of view.

In the enthusiasm of our great-great-great-great-grandfathers for the Utopia of Crusoe there was already implicit the Declaration of Independence of the American trading class from feudal European empire—and the steel-mills of Pittsburgh. . . .

## Chapter III

# *Late Eighteenth-Century Utopianism*

THE WISH TO GO DOWN ON ALL FOURS—THE NOBLE SAVAGE—THE AGE OF REASON—VOLTAIRE ON THE MERCHANT CLASS—NATURAL LAW AND ORDER—THE REVOLT OF THE BOURGEOISIE

WE in America are accustomed to regard the American Revolution as an American affair. But that was not the way the younger generation in Europe regarded it. Charles James Fox spoke for the young intelligentsia of the whole western world when he cried in the British parliament: "I rejoice that America has resisted!"

As a matter of fact, the Declaration of Independence was a reiteration of truths held to be self-evident not only in America but among the trading class and their sympathizers everywhere. It was a characteristic intellectual ex-

pression of the Utopian mood of the late eighteenth century. Earlier still, the Constitution of Massachusetts had declared: "All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and inalienable rights." And, fourteen years before Jefferson wrote into the Declaration of Independence that phrase about "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," Rousseau had set down at the top of the first page of "The Social Contract":

"Man is born free, and yet to-day he is everywhere in chains."

The latter part of that sentence is worthy of some special attention. It does not mean exactly what it may seem to us to mean. It does not quite mean: "Man has against his will been enslaved by kings." It means, rather: "Once the individual enters into complicated social arrangements, he is a slave."

It was meant as an indictment of those social tendencies by which man's life is so largely controlled—it is an indictment of what we have recently begun to call "the herd instinct," except that in Rousseau's view it was not an instinct, but something acquired and artificial.

"All our wisdom," he wrote, "consists in servile prejudices; all our customs are but anxiety and restraint. Civilized man lives and dies in a state of slavery." It is Civilization that is to blame. "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Things; but everything degenerates in the hands of man."

This gospel, so enunciated, might seem almost a gospel of despair; for it leaves mankind no hope, except in a return to a state of primordial pre-social individualistic savagery—if such a state may be conceived to have ever existed. When Rousseau sent his first book to Voltaire, the latter wrote to him: "I have received your new book against the human race, and I thank you for it. No one could paint in stronger colors the horrors of society. . . . When one reads your book, he is seized at once with a desire to go down on all fours."

We should be at a loss to understand why this apparently depressing doctrine was so well received in the eighteenth century, if we did not know that there were reasons of an economic sort which made a large number of people want to escape from the hampering relics

of feudal civilization. Knowing this, we discover that there was nothing depressing about such a doctrine; on the contrary, it was invigorating to ambitious youth.

Rousseau's books were burned by the hangman—an honor accorded only to popular books. Rousseau's ideas were "dangerous" precisely because people were so eager to believe in them. All the intelligent young people of Europe wanted to "go down on all fours"—to return to a state of individualistic savagery.

Their notion of savagery, to be sure, was not quite the same as ours. It was a noble savagery. The American Indian, who had already begun to be idealized, furnished some of the lines of the picture. But his shrewdness, independence, self-sufficiency, pride, equalitarianism—these were the traits not merely of the Indian but of the young American pioneer culture, and the natural traits of the rising bourgeoisie everywhere. The noble savage of eighteenth-century literature was less like an American Indian than like some gifted American tradesman. When Benjamin Franklin, in whom these pioneer virtues were summed up,

went to Europe as the ambassador of the New World, he was universally admired; *he* was the Noble Savage they had been talking about!

So it is not as strange as it might at first appear, that the intelligent young people of Europe in the eighteenth century should have wanted to "return to savagery," nor that they should have believed that they could. When Rousseau pointed out that civilization was an evil, they assented eagerly, and proposed to abolish it.

The eighteenth-century mind was a reasonable mind. As the age of faith waned, the age of reason had set in, and men believed in the power of reason instead of in other miracles. They believed that they could by thinking discover truth. They did not know to what an extent all human thought is colored and shaped by human passions—and theirs by the passion of hope.

The institutions of feudalism, the last vestiges of which had endured so long, were visibly crumbling into final ruin before men's eyes. The world was on the verge of some vast social change. It seemed reasonable to

believe that this change would be guided by the dictates of reason, rather than of passion. Kings and emperors themselves, in some instances, realized the duty of assisting the peaceful and orderly development of the new world order, and sought—even if they did not conspicuously follow—the counsel of scholars and philosophers as to what might be done.

Man was now for the first time in possession of the knowledge by which Nature could be tamed and made to serve her masters; the foundations of what we now call nineteenth-century science were being securely laid, and it was necessary only to turn this science to practical uses. It seemed reasonable enough that men should be able to work out some plan by which this mastership of nature could be harmoniously enjoyed.

From their own point of view, this expectation was merely the last term of a logical syllogism. We, looking back at the age to which they looked forward, can admire even while we smile sadly at their hopes—their vast and shining hopes for the future of mankind.

They were right enough in believing that

there was going to be a new social order. That it was going to be a happier social order was a more precarious hope.

The plan which some of these philosophers were engaged in elaborating would strike us as a strange basis for such glorious hopes, for it was in its essence simply modern capitalism.

The enterprising young thinkers of eighteenth-century Europe were not theorizing at random, not letting their imaginations loose in the realm of fancy. They were picturing to themselves—in ideal terms, of course—the full and complete development of something that had already begun.

The bourgeoisie, which had no place in the old feudal scheme, had grown into the most economically important class in society. A new social order had actually been created within the shell of the old. And yet, within this shell it could hardly function. At every moment its efforts were harassed, exploited and oppressed by the restrictions of feudalism.

The condition which chiefly hampered its activity was the division of society into classes with fixed duties and privileges. The bour-

geoisie required a world of free, unhampered opportunity. It must needs abhor the injustices of decaying feudalism, and aspire to a world in which men would be free and equal —a world of self-dependence, laissez-faire, unrestricted individual enterprise.

When young Voltaire visited England, he found there a fuller and freer development of trading-class activities than there was in all the rest of Europe; and he returned to France, now the citadel of surviving medievalism, to preach English freedom.

"In France," he wrote, "the merchant so constantly hears his business spoken of with disdain that he is fool enough to blush for it; yet I am not sure that the merchant who enriches his country, gives orders from his counting-house at Surat or Cairo, and contributes to the happiness of the globe, is not more useful to the state than the thickly bepowdered lord who knows exactly what time the king rises and what time he goes to bed."

It seems strange to us to think of a merchant class accustomed to hearing its business spoken of with disdain, and meekly accepting that val-

uation of its activities. Yet the power of tradition was still strong; the "English Letters" in which Voltaire expressed these sentiments—which would nowadays be written by Old Ed Howe and published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, unless perhaps they were regarded even by Mr. Lorimer as too platitudinous—were publicly burned in France as offenses against good manners and the respect due to the principalities and powers!

It was the task of such men as Voltaire to inspire within this class a due sense of its own importance, to make it cease to blush for itself, by destroying its respect for existing institutions. Men had to cease to believe in the old before they could enthusiastically serve the new. So, to the aspirations of the growing bourgeoisie for a new world, were naturally assimilated the aspirations of philosopher and prophet and poet.

One thing more was necessary before men could with all confidence proceed to tear down the tottering structure of feudalism. They had an instinctive love of order; and they had been trained so long in habitudes of obedience

to outward authority that they feared what might happen if that authority were destroyed. It must be made to seem reasonable to them that they could get along without such authority.

There was a need for the gospel of individualism—the doctrine that the individual is in himself good, orderly, self-governing. And Rousseau's doctrine served this need. What was wrong with man was wrong only with *social* man—that is to say, man in the feudal scheme. The individual, freed from social bondage, could be trusted to create a beautiful and happy new society, of his own impulses. The trouble was that Human Nature was now being artificially restricted by old laws and customs. Remove the restrictions, and all would be well.

So they read Rousseau. He had spoken, with the ardent simplicity of a sage, on behalf of Human Nature in its most anarchic sense, as many others have spoken, with equal sincerity, before and since. Seldom is any attention paid by society to such theorizings. But, as it significantly happened, the Human Na-

ture which was then struggling for freedom from artificial restrictions was the Human Nature of the Bourgeoisie. It was this economic situation which gave so wide a currency to what might otherwise have seemed, as it has before and since, the mere vagary of an unworldly philosopher.

To the rising bourgeoisie it was obvious enough that its natural impulses—the impulses of competition in particular and of gain in general—were being shamefully restricted. And it was sufficiently easy for them to believe that the world would be quite perfect, once these restrictions were removed.

It was the enterprising young trading class of the American colonies which first dared put the Rousseauian doctrine into action, and break loose from the tenuous hold which feudal Europe had upon its pioneer activities. But the citadel of feudalism, France, still remained intact. Nevertheless the American revolution had its part in shaping the events which were to follow in European history.

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness": in that utterance rings the splendid Utopian

confidence of the eighteenth century. It was clear that nothing need be feared from a courageous freeing of Human Nature from the moldy feudal bandages in which it was swathed. Mankind would be free and prosperous and peaceful; and men looked forward to the glorious new world which was about to be born.

## Chapter IV

# *Early Nineteenth-Century Despair*

THE BYRONIC MOOD—THE REIGN OF TERROR—THE MAN ON HORSEBACK—LITERARY REACTIONS

WHEN we were young we were given to read, as part of our education, Byron's "Childe Harold." Because it was part of "English literature" we were not told that it had any historical and social significance. It will be interesting, nevertheless, to compare its mood with that of the Declaration of Independence, written thirty-six years before. Forty years from 1776 brings us down to 1816, with all the world's eyes turned upon the fallen Napoleon.

We have forgotten, probably, what Byron's poem was about. But somewhere in our memory there may remain the fragment—

*"Roll on, thou dark and deep blue ocean,—*
*roll!*
*Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;*
*Man marks the earth with ruin, his control*
*Stops with the shore . . ."*

—for we are likely to remember the significant passage in a book, even though, as is also usual, we fail to realize consciously its significance.

That rhetorical address to the Ocean sums up the whole poem; and it states the Byronic mood.

It is certainly a mood vastly different from the glorious Utopianism of the eighteenth century. It is a kind of romantic despair. And in 1816, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it expressed for the intelligent young people of Europe their deepest feelings about the world in which they lived.

A single generation had passed since the declaration of American independence and the beginning of a new world order. And the mood of all western civilization had already changed from a soberly expressed but wild Utopian con-

fidence in man, to a rhetorically expressed but sad disgust of man.

The age of romanticism—and of despair—had begun. We find men fleeing by choice into some imaginative refuge from their fellows—seeking with morbid fondness those far and solitary peaks, glaciers, caverns, seas, deserts, which constitute the favorite milieu of early nineteenth-century poetry. Ocean and mountain and desert are alone free from the visible taint of man's folly. In sheer relief from the disgust or the horror with which the mind is afflicted by the cities and the battlefields of civilization, it turns to the rebellious and untamed purity of Nature, to all those wild and lonely aspects of earth as yet undisfigured by the impurities of man's spirit!

And yet there is no logical difference between the views of Byron and Rousseau. Byron could repeat: "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Things, but everything degenerates in the hands of man." But he would repeat it with a wry face. The difference is one of mood.

Mankind, in the Byronic and Rousseauian

view of the world, as in that Biblical morality in which they were supposed to be unbelievers, is fallen from grace—is at odds with the natural order of the universe. But Rousseau believed that Man could return to Nature. He was full of confidence. Byron had no such hope.

Byron's whole contribution to literature is the inculcation of an amused and amusing cynicism in regard to Human Nature. But it is a broken-hearted cynicism. He mocks because he once believed. His cynicism is the souring of a youthful love of mankind. Byron's youth had been nourished upon eighteenth-century Utopianism. He, too, once believed in man; and his cynic humor is the masquerade in which he disguises his indignation and chagrin at the betrayal of his hopes.

His strictures upon Human Nature are like those of a lover upon a beloved woman who has lied to him, fooled him, humiliated him. And it might well have been of frail Human Nature itself, with all its broken promises of beauty and happiness, instead of some mere mortal woman, that he wrote—

*"Thy vows are all broken,*
*And light is thy fame;*
*I hear thy name spoken,*
*And share in its shame.*

*"They name thee before me,*
*A knell to mine ear;*
*A shudder comes o'er me—*
*Why wert thou so dear?"*

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness . . ." "Man marks the earth with ruin." Between these two utterances, sufficiently characteristic of the times in which they were written—one full of infinite promise and the other full of shame and discouragement—some great disaster had occurred. The Utopian promises of the eighteenth century had seemed to prove false and vain; and Byronism was the immediate reaction to this spiritual shock.

To this event, then, which intervened between these two utterances, we must turn for the explanation of the initial direction of nineteenth-century literature.

The uprising of Human Nature had come—

and it had shocked the world. It had been utterly different from what the idealists had expected. The Revolution had been conducted by good men—pure-minded and reasonable men, such as Robespierre and Marat, men who truly wished to create a free and happy human society; and such men, it seemed, were only made more cruel and terrible by their ideals. This was the "return to savagery" with a vengeance!

This discovery—that ideals could produce a Reign of Terror—had a profound effect upon the literature of Europe, and particularly upon that of England. It made men distrust ideals.

Coleridge had been a social idealist, and had proposed the starting of a communist Utopia, a "Pantisocracy," to realize these ideals; *after* the French revolution, he retired into metaphysics and opium and the faëry realm of Kubla Khan.

Southey, who in his youth had written a drama celebrating the workingmen's revolt led by Wat Tyler, had collaborated in planning this communistic experiment; but in view of what Revolution in deadly fact seemed to

mean, he recanted his views, adopted a set of extra-respectable opinions—and was made Poet Laureate.

Wordsworth had written a series of "Lyrical Ballads"—intended, it would seem, to do for the common people of England something of the sort that Turgenev later did for the serfs of Russia in his "Sportsman's Sketches"; he was in France in the early days of the Revolution, and he hailed it eagerly, declaring that these were days when to be alive was good, but to be young was very heaven—and incidentally, in the flush of that revolutionary enthusiasm he begot a child out of wedlock; and then he too, reluctantly, turned his back upon his rash early theories of freedom, and ended his days piously in the Laureateship.

These were among the immediate literary results of the discovery that benevolent theories may lead to bloody deeds. But the English literary tradition, which had robustly included the pamphleteering of Defoe, the polemics of Milton, the satires of Swift, as readily as the "sugred sonnets" of Shakespeare,—this healthy literary tradition was being grad-

ually terrorized by the events in France into a peculiar kind of inhospitableness to new and critical or Utopian thought.

The Reign of Terror in France lasted a few days. The Reign of Terror in English literature has lasted nearly ever since.

But, even more than the Revolution itself, its consequences served to dishearten the higher imaginative life of Europe. These consequences we are now able to see more clearly and judge more truly, precisely because we feel them less keenly. We know now that the French Revolution was not destined to inaugurate a régime of universal happiness; we know that its function was to sweep away the last effective restraints upon the development of the bourgeoisie, and to inaugurate the triumphant reign of capitalism. We know that it performed its function magnificently. But we can understand that when the last *effective* restraints upon the bourgeoisie were swept away, the bourgeoisie would make peace with the church, and endeavor to come to terms with the institution of royalty, in order that it might

settle down to the immediate enjoyment of its triumph.

And so it happened. The bourgeoisie, in a reaction of temper, chopped off the heads of its own most furious and uncompromising fanatics —as soon as their fanaticism had done its work and was no longer needed. And in the same spirit, it turned its back upon all the poets and prophets of perfection. "Enough!" it cried. And in the person of Napoleon it took the crown of Empire from the hands of the church and crowned itself.

The phenomenon of Napoleon was not fully understood by contemporary idealists. It was merely the Second Phase of the Bourgeois Revolution. The trading class had to carve with the sword a place for itself among the broken trappings of royalty in Europe. The kings least of all understood the situation. They thought they had to deal simply with an upstart emperor; and they were satisfied when they had put him away to die in captivity on St. Helena, and "reëstablished order." But in reëstablishing order, they were only finishing

Napoleon's job, and by Napoleon's favorite means—force, and the suppression of the press. The black "reaction" which hung over Europe so long, and against which the idealists raged so impotently, was the Third Phase of the Revolution, from which the kings emerged as the servants of capitalism. Feudal power had been overthrown by a power which could dispense with the formal insignia of authority.

But to the idealistic observers of that period, it seemed that the moral of the Revolution was the coming of the Man on Horseback. The people, or so it appeared to them, could not rule themselves—they degenerated into a mob in which the lowest passions ruled; and these passions, swaying fitfully between terror and terrorism, presently merged into an enthusiasm for the Strong Man. And so—said the idealists—the cycle runs, from Empire to Empire, from the Great Louis to Napoleon the Great, with the Revolution as only a terrible or pathetic interlude.

This crude theory of history, based upon the most superficial aspect of events, and omitting what was significant in them, was a view which

appealed to minds trained to look for the moral rather than the economic meanings of history. It was a discouraging view; but it had, after the first pangs of disappointment were dulled, an element of hope in it.

Though Napoleon might be a tyrant—and English idealists in particular could not permit themselves to admire him—yet he did, however incongruously, extend the ideas of Republicanism to the borders of his Empire. The boy Heine had been deeply impressed with this fact; and he, like many another European idealist, centered what was left of his Utopian faith, during the period of reaction, around memories of the great Republican Emperor.

Echoes of this naïve enthusiasm come to us in Hugo and Stendhal. But English literature divorced the idea of the Man on Horseback from the memory of Napoleon, and it emerged as the belief, which was to grow into a cult, of the salvation of our decadent society by Great Men. Of this theory Carlyle was the chief Victorian prophet.

## Chapter V

## *Back to the Middle Ages!*

THE POETS LEAVE ENGLAND—"FREEDOM, THY BANNER, TORN BUT FLYING"—TWO VICTORIAN POETS—LITERARY GRAND OPERA—A VICTORIAN PROPHET—A VICTORIAN CRITIC

BUT if Napoleon was the most romantically impressive consequence of the French Revolution, he was not the most discouraging one. The consequence which was by far the most saddening was the very consequence which, as we know, the Revolution had been fought to achieve—that is to say, Capitalism.

Men had hoped for universal happiness. What they actually faced was a continually increasing misery. The great discoveries of the eighteenth century in the realm of physical science, which had been intended to make man the master of things, were being supplemented

by new discoveries and inventions which tended more and more to make him their slave. And the young enterprise of capitalism expressed itself in the most merciless exploitation of its human victims, particularly in England, where it also earliest began to justify itself in its mercilessness by a new theory of economics. "All men are created free and equal" became more frankly: "Each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

It was the reaction of imaginative literature to this consequence of the Revolution that determined the main character of English literature for many years.

Byron, in whom the various aspects of that period of shock and disappointment are vividly and personally dramatized, left England. And with him, English poetry left England and the contemporary world, and returned to the Middle Ages. In giving his "Childe Harold" a medieval name, Byron had begun the first of a long series of Pilgrimages back to that lost paradise from which the previous generation had been so eager to escape.

When Byron left England, he set something

more than a fashion in English poetry; his practice was followed by Shelley, Keats, Landor and Browning. To leave England became the typically English thing for English poets to do. They left England because they could not live in England; and they could not live in England because England was the foremost capitalist country on earth. That is why they went to Italy, and in particular to Florence, which was simply a lovely relic of medieval antiquity. They had, in fact, left England in the effort to escape from capitalism; and they had turned—not to the future, for they were without hope—but to the past.

But were they indeed without hope? Shelley, the boldest Utopian of them all, hardly dared to look forward—the thought of the fatal cycle into which the glorious French Revolution had inevitably swung, was too deadly a constraint.

*"The world's great age begins anew,*
*The golden years return,*
*The earth doth like a snake renew*
*Her winter weeds outworn:*

*Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam*
*Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.*"

So it begins. But how will it end, this visioned Utopia? Alas, after the pattern furnished too clearly by the French Revolution.

"*O cease! must hate and death return?*
*Cease! must men kill and die?*
*Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn*
*Of bitter prophecy.*
*The world is weary of the past,*
*O might it die, or rest at last!*"

The cloud of that despair is over all his thoughts; and he turns to find in Italy some "green isle" in "the wide deep sea of misery." Keats, too, turned away from the trampling of the "hungry generations," from "the weariness, the fever and the fret," from this modern world "where but to think is to be full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despairs," to a fairyland colored with all the hues of medieval romance. And Byron, though he scorned the conformers, though he mocked at the renegades "Mouthey"

and "Words-words," as he called them, though his gesture was defiance and his creed rebellion, he too ran away.

Byron could not fight hypocrisy—which was the aspect of capitalism that, being most English, was most hateful to him—in its citadel; but he could, and he did, go to some remote corner of Europe to fight and die in a vain attempt to restore an antique freedom. That was courageous; but it was not farsighted—for under cover of its nationalistic idealism, Greece was struggling to become as much as possible like the very England which Byron hated. The happier he, that he did not live to carry his Balkan adventure to success!

In this act, too, Byron was echoed, at least in words, by a generation of his successors, who hailed with enthusiasm the aspirations to freedom of each oppressed nationality in turn. It was as if they hoped that these new nations would be something new in our dull and hateful world. A free Poland, surely, they thought, would be a spectacle to revive the hearts of mankind. . . . The Southern Confederacy, a sufficiently gallant and romantic adventure in

nationality, fell heir to these same enthusiasms, and the intelligentsia of London quivered with rage and horror at the brutality of "that monster," Lincoln,—the servant, as they accurately designated him, of Northern capitalism—in crushing this revival of feudal aristocratic pretensions.

In truth, the Utopian faith which had been dimmed by the consequences of the French Revolution, found a new outlet in these naïve and uncritical enthusiasms, which bulked large in the idealism of the whole century. The idealists of Europe had ceased to hope for a better day, except as it were by stealth, in some manner so preposterous and romantic as to disguise the nature of their hopes even from themselves.

In view of this tendency in nineteenth-century literature, it will not surprise us to find the two chief poets of the Victorian period in some kind of revolt against the machine-ruled age in which they lived.

Tennyson and Browning had the centers of their spiritual orbits set in the medieval world; and though they swung out occasionally into

sight of the realities of their own time, yet they were always drawn back into times of King Arthur and Count Gismond, where they instinctively preferred to dwell. But their reasons for preferring to dwell there were characteristically different, and show two of the main reasons why the intelligentsia of their time disliked capitalism.

Tennyson yearned after beauty—as Keats had yearned, but more feebly. His was not, like Keats', the tragic pathos of "*a sick eagle looking on the sky.*" His was rather the more mundane anguish of a young man who had to wait on customers in a shop all through a lovely summer's day. Tennyson never actually had to wait on customers in a shop, but he always seemed to conceive the modern world in such terms; it was an affair of cheating or being cheated—a dreary or a dirty business, and painful to think about either way. It would be much better to go off to war—"*to leap from his counter and till, and strike, were it but his cheating yard-wand, home!*"

But Tennyson was not the sort of boy who runs away to war or off to sea; he was the sort

that runs away to join a traveling company of actors. There was always something theatrical about him; his imagination reveled in the tinsel trappings of the stage, the swords and crowns and robes and thrones, and the showy heroics and juvenile morality that went along with them. He built his medieval world out of these trappings, and glorified them by the magic of his verse. In this world he was happy; and he helped to make the Victorian world happy, by enabling people to forget the sordid realities of their own lives.

He disliked the modern world because it was no place for a dreamer to live; and even though he was made Poet Laureate as a reward for his dreaming, it gave him no better opinion of the world that lay outside the enchanted circle of his dreams. But it is important to note that he was a popular poet *not* because he celebrated the achievements of his age, but because he questioned them. He did sometimes indulge in a cautious parliamentary hope concerning the future peace and progress of mankind under some sort of very British "Federation of the World"; but what one most vividly

remembers of his remarks on contemporary progress is the ironic "I, the heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of time"—an echo, thinned and weak, of Byron's wilder mockery.

Browning was not a dreamer; he was a man of action. He did not find the modern world too chaotic; he found it—just as he found the orderly and accustomed ways of writing verse —too dull, too regular. His enthusiasm was intrigued only by the more questionable and adventurous aspects of contemporary life, its Sludges and Warings and Bishop Bloughrams, people with a touch of romantic charlatanism in them; but mostly his imagination overflowed into the Middle Ages, where it found wild impossibilists and intransigents sufficiently to his taste, the Count Gismonds and Childe Rolands, and the death-dedicated lovers of gondola and balcony.

He was a modernist, in the sense that he was very much interested in the ideas of his time; but he was impatient of his time, because it did not put those ideas into action. There was a reason; those ideas were tame ideas;

they could not flame up into causes worth dying for—nor even, as it seemed to him, into passions strong enough to lead to interesting crimes:

*"And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost*
*Is the unlit lamp, and the ungirt loin—*
*Though the end in sight was a vice, I say."*

It was the deadly machine-made and machine-ruled regularity of life under capitalism that he could not tolerate; and he too fled to Italy, and to medieval romance, leaving the largest part of contemporary reality untouched by his pen.

Contemporary reality was left to the writers of fiction. And to illustrate what happened in fiction, the case of one of the least known of these fictionists is the most instructive for our purposes. Charles Reade was at the outset a writer of the greatest promise; he had an imagination which responded heartily to the impact of contemporary reality, and he had the power to dramatize such reality in vivid and impres-

sive narrative. He hated contemporary England; and one can gain from his novels, more easily than from any other of the imaginative productions of the time, an idea of what that England was really like, in shop and business, law and medicine and daily life.

But a literary standard had already been established, against which his realism collided with catastrophic results. People did not want to hear what contemporary life was like. The critics called him a liar; and he amassed bulky files of newspaper clippings to prove his theses, and neglected the proper business of the story-teller for that of the historian. They also called him a "reformer,"—and grimly accepting the charge, he continued to indict the age in which he lived, and to make the dose go down he seasoned and garnished it with a preposterous assortment of the most wildly romantic blood-and-thunder incidents. These incidents ruin his novels; but they are no more absurd than those which fill the pages of his more famous contemporaries; they are only more hastily invented, and more shockingly incongruous with their context.

The literary standard with which his realism had collided had been imperceptibly created by the poets of the Romantic period, in their disheartened turning away from present ugliness to ideal beauty; it had been reënforced by the timidity induced by the violence of the French Revolution, which had made ideas seem dangerous (or at least "bad form"); and this tradition was now being made sacred by the practice of Reade's great contemporaries, Dickens and Thackeray. It was now an accepted view that to have anything resembling a connected and intelligible set of critical ideas put you at once outside the bounds of "pure literature," into the category of incendiaries or pulpiteers.

Dickens and Thackeray preached against preaching. The people in their pages who have theories are either hypocrites or fools. "Kindliness and tolerance are worth all the creeds in the world." Such is the substance of their criticism. They had taken the precaution to put the public off its guard. They too hated contemporary England; but they criticized it emotionally, not intellectually. Instead of

theories, they provided floods of comedy and pathos. They made people laugh and cry who did not want to think.

Both Dickens and Thackeray had begun their literary careers as humorists—they had learned the art of giving the public what it wanted. And what it wanted most of all was to forget its own troubles. Their writings must have first of all the quality of an anodyne. That was the secret of those emotional effects which in their work came to take the place of honest thinking, honest statement, and even honest story-telling. They created a literary Grand Opera.

Their influence afforded an impressive and disastrous example to English fiction. It served to counteract the oldest, honester example of Fielding, and to obliterate utterly the memory of the simple candor of Defoe. Fiction ceased to tell the truth. People could not bear to have the truth told.

De Quincey had invented a new species of prose, a prose which approached poetry in its effects, and which represented a reaction against eighteenth-century precision and coldness, and

a return to the loose eloquence of the seventeenth century. This new development had found its greatest exponent in Dickens, a marvelous improvisator of verbal effects, who seemed to twist words to his fancy, juggle with them, pile them one on another in perilous architectonic feats, mix them like colors on canvas, play tunes with them, creating atmospheric and emotional effects of well-nigh irresistible power. Carlyle had a power over words as stupendous as Dickens, though not as unconstrained. The reason for the popularity of these eccentric verbal tricks is perhaps to be found in the need, at such a time, for giving a protective coloration of emotion to ideas.

In this kind of emotionally intoxicating prose, Carlyle analyzed the decadence of contemporary society, and proposed a means for its salvation. He, like the poets, was disgusted with the modern world; and like them he had turned back to the medieval world for solace. He saw there a social scheme which satisfied him, in its contrast to the chaos of modern industrialism—a system of class duties and class privileges so beautiful in its perfection that he

solemnly proposed it, in all seriousness, as a solution of latter-day problems.

It would indeed have been a simple remedy, if the mad conflict of capitalist competition and exploitation could have been resolved into a mutually beneficent and dutiful relation of leaders and followers, of heroes and henchmen! And, in Carlyle's scheme, the motivation of this simple change, the means of inculcating these notions of duty among disorganized mankind, was the appearance of the Hero.

The origin of both heroes and hero-worship in a primarily militaristic condition of society made it inevitable that he should conceive his ideal society in rather rigorously militaristic terms. But his militarism was only metaphorical. He would have been surprised to learn that his blood-and-iron maxims were capable of being acted upon by a coming generation in the very Germany which he so admired,* and

* "The literary world then agreed that truth survived in Germany alone, and Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, Renan, Emerson, with scores of popular followers, taught the German faith. The literary world had revolted against the yoke of coming capitalism—its money-lenders, its bank-directors, and its railway magnates. Thackeray and Dickens followed Bal-

that the rejuvenation of feudalism would not solve, but would only complicate, the terrible problems of capitalism.

The reign of verbal extravagance, the Early Victorian Boom in words, seems to have collapsed gradually as a result of the impact upon the public mind of the Darwinian theory. This was an idea which, for reasons presently to be explained, was of importance to everybody, and had to be discussed soberly. It could not simply be set to music. The publication of the Darwinian views served to change the mood of the period from one of emotionalism to one of skepticism. And when we turn from Car-

zac in scratching and biting the unfortunate middle class with savage ill-temper, much as the middle class had scratched and bitten the Church and Court for a hundred years before. The middle class had the power, and held its coal and iron well in hand, but the satirists and idealists seized the press, and as they were agreed that the Second Empire was a disgrace to France and a danger to England, they turned to Germany because at that moment Germany was neither economical nor military, and a hundred years behind western Europe in the simplicity of its standards. German thought, method, honesty, and even taste, became the standards of scholarship. Goethe was raised to the rank of Shakespeare —Kant raised as a lawgiver above Plato. All serious scholars were obliged to become German."

—*The Education of Henry Adams.*

lyle, whose mind was untouched by the influences of this critical period, the tumult and the shouting dies.

Spencer, Huxley, and in the field of fiction, George Eliot, represent this critical spirit. But the most significant figure is perhaps that of Matthew Arnold. His quiet and somewhat cynical precision of utterance is in striking contrast to Carlyle's uncritical enthusiasm; and yet he too, no less than Carlyle, wanted to believe.

> *"For mankind has such need of joy—*
> *But joy whose grounds are* true!
> *And joy that should all hearts employ,*
> *As when the world was new."*

He, too, loved the Middle Ages; but he could not quite believe that the world's sorrows were to be cured by moving backward several hundred years. He could not quite believe in any panacea; no, not even in German philosophy!

Arnold was more a man of the world—less provincial, less insular, less English—than any of his older contemporaries among men of let-

ters. He was a "good European." He was the most urbane and, in spite of a certain priggishness, the most broadly sympathetic critic that England ever produced. He was, indeed, too European, too *superior* to the Puritan tradition, to be quite a typical Englishman. It is noteworthy that in his case the classical influences which are dispersed formally upon all educated Englishmen only to be shed off again as naturally as water from a duck's back, and which appear in English literature only with a medieval tinge or admixture—these pagan influences really left their mark upon his mind.

For, though he too turned to the medieval world, it was for solace; he sought in the past some type of philosophical and religious calm upon which to model his life; and in that seeking he was more pagan than Christian. He looked at the world with the eyes of a late Latin, of the period which had despaired of reason and which only good taste held still aloof from the vulgarities of superstition. His contribution to the Biblical controversy of his time, for example, was the same tolerant compromise as that of the good Roman em-

perors, such as Marcus Aurelius, who felt that the old myths contained spiritual nourishment, though he himself did not believe in them. There is in him the same pagan weariness as in the days that slanted on toward the final downfall of Rome—the weariness which comes from lack of hope and the restless urging of a wish to believe. Arnold might have turned back to the enlightened paganism of Marcus Aurelius, whom he understood so well, save that he knew in what disgust of spirit that paganism had died. He envied the bright faith of the early Christians, and the tub-thumping enthusiasm of Carlyle—vainly, for he was not of them. He most nearly found his spiritual counterpart in those Christian mystics or pagan philosophers who retired from the world and loved beauty amid the practice of austerities. But his fancy ranged, and now it was with Empedocles, about to throw himself in despair into the crater of Mt. Ætna, and now with Obermann, a later refugee from this mad world, to whose tomb in the Alps he made two pious pilgrimages, that he imaginatively identified himself. . . . It was the

quiet, unrhetorical, unflamboyant, undramatic despair of a gentleman. He had asked himself what was the use of living in nineteenth-century capitalism, and after critical deliberation he could return no adequate answer.

He did not commit suicide, like the Greek philosopher, nor retire from the world, like Obermann; he was too much of a gentleman, and of a pagan stoic, to do either. He continued to live a busy and useful life, and to write acute and sympathetic criticism of men and books. Nevertheless, he represents the beginnings of a spiritual breakdown, in an age that could not face its own reality. He foreshadows the hysterias, the new religions, the mad mysticisms, which became more and more the relief in which sensitive men and women found solace against the meaninglessness of existence.

## Chapter VI

# *The Darwinian Controversy*

THE TONG-WAR BETWEEN RELIGION AND SCIENCE—POPULAR DARWINISM—"NATURE RED IN TOOTH AND CLAW"—"GOD'S IN HIS HEAVEN, ALL'S RIGHT WITH THE WORLD"—DARWINISM IN FICTION AND POETRY

IN 1859, Darwin published his book, "The Origin of Species," and thereby precipitated a crisis in human thought which is reflected, but hardly explained, in the literature of controversy to which it gave rise; for the noise and fury of that controversy have served effectively to obscure the question really at issue.

It is important for us to realize that it was not, as it was most luridly advertised, a conflict between Religion and Science.

There has been, it is true, an ancient feud between Institutionalized Religion and Insti-

tutionalized Science, which has flared up at intervals into a kind of Tong-war, in which the more fanatical adherents of each cause have sworn to exterminate the other from the earth. But when the storm has blown over, each has been found doing business at the old stand; and the war has proved to be in the end nothing more than a lively advertising campaign between rivals to whom competition is indeed the life of trade. The Darwinian controversy was taken advantage of in this manner by the partisans of Religion and Science, but their mutual recriminations would lead us far astray from the real question at issue.

Still less did the controversy center around the question of the acceptance or rejection of the theory of Evolution.

The theory of Evolution was not exactly new. In its vaguer philosophic form, it had been current for a century, as the notion of a universal change from cruder to finer and lower to higher modes of life. In its general biological significance it had been set forth by Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles Darwin. But institutions, including the inherited

formulations of scientific thought, are slow to change; and in default of patiently accumulated proof of the alteration of one species into another, biology rested upon the remarkably accurate but non-evolutionary classification of species handed down by the great Cuvier. It remained only for some one to come forward with proof of the development of one species into another, and after the usual flurry of doubt and denunciation and enthusiasm, and the usual efforts of the more partisan clergy to make capital out of these latest heresies of the scientific tribe, the matter would have been settled—without everybody in the world hearing all about it, and feeling it as an acute personal problem.

Nor was it precisely Darwin's specific formulation and substantiation of the theory that determined the character of the crisis which followed the publication of his views. What happened, in a sense, was that Darwin secured for biological science an immense amount of advertising. Doubtless he had hoped to call general attention to the fact of evolution; but that was only part of what he originally set out

to do. His immediate contribution to biologic thought was a theory of how evolution had occurred.

His theory explained the transmission of acquired traits by a supposition about the constitution of the germ-plasm. This supposition was called "pangenesis." Darwin supposed that the germ-plasm in each individual was made up of infinitely tiny particles from all parts of the body; and that these particles represented—somewhat as the British parliament represented—the changes that had occurred in their various constituencies.

This notion, so eminently parliamentarian and British, gave no offense to the public, and was soon quietly forgotten by the biologists. It was the other part of his explanation that caused the storm.

The other part was the doctrine of "natural selection." The new traits, whose transmission he had explained by "pangenesis," and of whose origin he gave no explanation, save that they had arisen in response to environmental conditions—these changes were supposed by him to be so infinitely small that the difference be-

tween one generation and the next was of the slightest sort. Nevertheless, slight as these changes were, their existence served to make their possessors fitter to survive. And it was these slightly changed individuals who did survive, and pass on these traits to their successors—who, in the course of many, many generations, would accumulate enough changes to be finally a new and different species.

In lieu of any explanation as to the *origin* of these variations, he put the emphasis of his explanation upon the process by which they were preserved. The *competition* between the fortunate possessors of these slight but advantageous variations, and their less fortunate contemporaries—the so-called "struggle for existence"—was thus elevated to the position of the prime cause of evolutionary change: and, by implication in the popular mind, it was understood to be the cause of progress in general.

We are now in a position to see why "Darwinism" became the moot question of the day. It did, in effect, discover at the very basis of the scheme of life the hated conditions of the new capitalistic order—the life-and-death

struggle between more and less fortunately equipped individuals.

To a century which was seeking escape from the realization of the horrors among which it lived, it showed a universe in which those horrors were reflected upon a grand scale—a "Nature red in tooth and claw." And, correspondingly, a popular version of this theory was eagerly seized upon and exploited by those who consciously or unconsciously wished to justify the competitive order. It was, in their view, a scientific sanction of the doctrine of "Each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

It was inevitable, under these circumstances, that the battle against so malevolent a theory of the universe should be taken up by representatives of the Church. But, as to the benevolence of the universe, the Church was itself in a poor position to speak; for the hell which occupied so large a portion of its cosmology was too much like the "struggle for existence" in popular Darwinism and in capitalist Manchester, to afford any solace to shocked emotions. While as for the more Calvinistic branches of Christianity, they had already committed

themselves to the doctrine of the "survival of the fittest" in the form of "predestination," and their fatalism could offer no very cheering contrasts to Darwin's mechanistic scheme. It was left for the poets to speak up for the goodness of God; which they could do without constraint, having already freed themselves from theological limitations, and being in a position to utter such heretical but comforting conclusions as

*"God's in his heaven—All's right with the world!"*

But the most desperate pressure upon the human imagination was made by that part of the Darwinian theory which required *eons of time* for the processes of evolution to be fulfilled. And here notably the doctrines of religion were capable of being made use of as a means of resistance against such pressure. We can scarcely understand, without reference to that Utopian idealism which had been submerged by the events of the French Revolution, but which still lived on in the darkness of men's unconscious minds, the terrific objection to the

idea of thousands of years being required to produce a significant change in species. But men were not thinking about species. They were thinking about themselves. And they were not worried about how many millenniums it had taken to get them where they were; they were worried about how many millenniums it was going to take to get them somewhere else. They were not, in fact, anxious about the past; they were anxious about the future.

Popular Darwinism made it impossible for them to look forward with any hope. If change was a matter of ages, and if the creation of a new form of society was to be effected by such ages upon ages of "struggle for existence," then it was a desperate outlook. Men did not want to think about the struggle for existence at all; they could not bear to think of a millennium of it. They could not bring themselves to believe in this terrible idea of slow and gradual change. And, if they did not quite dare to look forward to any sudden and catastrophic alteration in social and economic organization, they could at least deny the gradual-change theory as it pertained to the past. And so they armed themselves with the Bible, and flung Genesis at the

head of the Darwinians. What God had done once, some miracle might perhaps bring to pass again: and God *had* created the world in six days, only fifty or so short centuries ago. . . .

It was some time before the Darwinian point of view found sympathetic expression in any literature other than that of controversy. But we may assign to the prose and poetry of George Meredith and of Thomas Hardy this influence.

In Meredith's poetry the Darwinian philosophy has become admixed with a kind of serenified Dionysian nature-worship, and expresses itself in the confident assertion that the purposes of Earth, terrible though they may be, are ultimately good:

"*Seeing she lives, and of her joy of life*
*Creatively has given us blood and breath*
*For endless war and never wound unhealed,*
*The gloomy Wherefore of our battlefield*
*Solves in the Spirit, wrought of her through strife*
*To know her own and trust her down to death.*"

In his novels—and in the sonnets of "Modern Love"—he exhibits his Darwinian influence in a critical attitude toward his characters, seeking to discover in them those essential flaws in their composition by which they are doomed to failure.

"*We are betrayed by what is false within.*" We have here the unmistakable signs of an adjustment to determinism in the form of an alert and interested reading of human history by its light. Meredith is able to bear up, and even to laugh—though his humor is elaborate and far from infectious—under the burden of that fatality. It is a hopeful sign.

In the novels and poems of Thomas Hardy, on the contrary, the acceptance of the Darwinian implications is couched in no cheerful mood. The gloom of the earliest hopelessness which that theory evoked still hangs over his work. His characters are veritably doomed; by the processes of the universe, or by the whim of that malevolent deity which seems in Mr. Hardy's imagination to preside over human affairs, or sometimes, indeed, by the deliberate interposition of Mr. Hardy himself. His char-

acters have unrelieved and, it would sometimes seem, inexplicable streaks of bad luck. His novels are in no sense *explanations* of such careers; they are sad and fearless *statements* that such careers are to be found all about us.

In lieu of any effort to explain, and much less to justify "the gloomy Wherefore of our battlefield," Mr. Hardy's magnificent literary courage has had to expend itself in a defiant compassion; and by force of his example he has inevitably become the founder of the Cult of Pity in modern English fiction.

## Chapter VII

# *This Way to the Ivory Tower!*

MEDIEVALISM IN POLITICS, LITERATURE AND ART—THE ESTHETES—GRUB STREET AND GUINEVERE—LIFE AS A SUCCESSION OF EXQUISITE SENSATIONS—"ÉPATER LE BOURGEOIS"—DEBACLE

THE whole Darwinian controversy had been a belated and tormented coming-into-consciousness of the fact that the great Utopian hopes of the late eighteenth century had unfolded themselves in the dreary and horrible realities of nineteenth-century capitalism. The final result of that controversy, of that unwilling consciousness of a terrible truth, was a kind of universal spiritual exhaustion.

But its immediate result was the revival of medievalism, with something of a new and Utopian flavor. Already, in Ruskin's medievalism, there was the germ of a new movement

in art and industry; for where the other Victorians had seen only romance, or the military virtues, Ruskin saw the happy union of the artistic and industrial virtues, in that medieval world. It began to seem possible to revive those virtues, not merely to talk about them. The "Pre-Raphaelites" were the first to commence the actual practice of those virtues, as they understood them.

Out of this "Pre-Raphaelite" movement came two distinct tendencies—according to the emphasis which was variously put upon the artistic and industrial aspects of this enterprise. Under the leadership of William Morris, the new movement turned more and more toward a facing of the problems of capitalism. Morris himself joined the Socialist movement, and helped to create a kind of Romantic Socialism, peculiarly English.

Socialism had two main sources—one in eighteenth-century Utopianism, which had expended itself in the communistic experiments of Fourier and Cabet and, in England, Owen; its other source was in the determinist theory of Marx and Engels, which had been formulated

at about the same time as Darwinism, and which was philosophically akin to it. In the Marxian theory there was, however, a place for catastrophic change, as the culmination of long periods of economic development—something like the sudden "mutation" in the De Vriesian theory by which Darwinian ideas of evolution were later supplemented. But after the failure of the revolutionary hopes which had attended the inception of the Marxian theory, and perhaps more especially after the Paris Commune—which in a minor way had upon Socialist Utopianism the same effects as the French Revolution upon middle-class Utopianism—after such emotional disappointments, the adherents of Marxian Socialism settled down to develop the deterministic aspects of their belief. The English mind, with its temperamental romanticism (a romanticism which was the first instinctive reaction to the horrors of enterprising English capitalism) was a poor soil for the sowing of these fatalistic theories; and it was when William Morris brought into English socialism the breath of medievalism that it first seemed to begin to

flourish. And this Romantic Socialism has, through various vicissitudes, continued to propagate itself in England,—its latest development, at the present day, being the theory of "Guild Socialism." It is important now only for us to note the direction of one tendency of this late-Victorian revival of the medieval spirit.

The other tendency branched away into a greater preoccupation with art for its own sake, or rather for its qualities as a refuge from the hatefulness of capitalism. This is well illustrated by the poetry and the painting of Rossetti, which set a model of beautiful unreality to which the spirit of the age responded with a kind of tired gusto. But, tired or not, it was still, at first, gusto.

"What they wanted in life," says Ford Madox Hueffer, in his delightful book of "Memories and Impressions," "was room to expand and to be at ease. Thus I remember, in a sort of golden vision, Rossetti lying upon a sofa in the back studio with lighted candles at his head, while two extremely beautiful ladies dropped grapes into his mouth. But Rossetti

did this not because he desired to present the beholder with a beautiful vision, but because he liked lying on sofas, he liked grapes, and he particularly liked beautiful ladies."

Swinburne, the last of the great medievalists, attacked Christianity with all the passion of a heretic priest. He tried to find solace, as Byron had done in fighting for Greece, in hailing the cause of an aspiring nationality in his "Songs Before Sunrise"—a series of beautiful and noble anachronisms, in which he succeeded for the moment in forgetting that the glorious republican ideals which he acclaimed had already been realized and stultified in the reactionary and hypocritic England of his day. And in the same volume, in such poems as "Hertha," he effected an identification between evolutionary determinism and a kind of unconsciously Buddhistic philosophy—a state of mind in which he achieved a temporary reconciliation of his baffled spirit with the universe. But in his "Poems and Ballads," his most characteristic utterance, he is at odds with all the universe except that "great sweet mother," the Sea. To it, like Byron before, he came for

comfort. It was literally all he had left to love; he did not believe in man, and the rest of the universe was evil. "The thorns are left when the rose is taken"—an obvious example of the survival of the fittest. Though he defied "the Galilean" (by which he meant nothing other than nineteenth-century capitalistic respectability and hypocrisy) to take from him "the laurel, the palms, and the pæan, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake," yet even these his dreams were poisoned by the knowledge of the decay that overtakes all beauty. He had nothing to believe in, though he tried many things—anticipating to some extent even the poetic imperialism of Kipling. He could at best only celebrate the exquisite anguish of living, and glorify Life as "Our Lady of Pain."

Nevertheless, it is true that he, and all the rest of these early esthetes, enjoyed themselves; enjoyed themselves quite boisterously in this evil and ugly world; and that was more than their successors could do.

Concerning their successors, one can do no better than look again at Ford Madox Hueffer's candid volume of reminiscences:

"I suppose they sang of Lancelot and Guinevere to take their minds off their surroundings, having been driven into their surroundings by the combined desire for cheap rents and respectable addresses. Some of them were conscious of the gloom; some no doubt were not. Mr. Joaquin Miller, coming from Nicaragua and Arizona to stay for a time in Gower street—surely the longest, the grayest, and the most cruel of all London streets—this author of the 'Songs of the Sierras' was greeted rapturously by the Pre-Raphaelite poets, and wrote of life in London as a rush, a whirl, a glow—all the motion of the world. He wrote ecstatically and at the same time with humility, pouring out his verses as one privileged to be at table with all the great ones of the earth. . . .

"But if Mr. Miller saw in London life, light, and the hope of fame, and if some of the poets saw it in similar terms, there were others who saw the city in terms realistic enough. Thus poor James Thomson, writing as B. V., sang of the City of Dreadful Night, and, we are told, drank himself to death. That was the grisly

side of it. If you were a poet you lived in deep atmospheric gloom and, to relieve yourself, to see color, you must sing of Lancelot and Guinevere. If the visions would not come, you must get stimulants to give you them.

"I remember as a child being present in the drawing-room of a relative just before a dinner at which Tennyson and Browning had been asked to meet a rising young poet to whom it was desired to give a friendly lift. It was the longest and worst quarter of an hour possible. The celebrities fidgeted, did not talk, looked in Olympian manner at their watches. At last they went in to dinner without the young poet. I was too little and too nervous to tell them that half an hour before I had seen the poor fellow lying hopelessly drunk across a whelk-stall in the Euston Road.

"One of the grimmest stories that I have heard even of that time and neighborhood was told me by the late Mr. William Sharp. Mr. Sharp was himself a poet of the Pre-Raphaelites, though later he wrote as Fiona Macleod, and thus joined the Celtic school of poetry that still flourishes in the person of Mr. W. B.

Yeats. Mr. Sharp had gone to call on Philip Marston, the blind author of 'Songtide,' and of many other poems that in that day were considered to be a certain passport to immortality. Going up the gloomy stairs of a really horrible house near Gower street Station, he heard proceeding from the blind poet's rooms a loud sound of growling, punctuated by muffled cries for help. He found the poor blind man in the clutches of the poet I have just omitted to name," [the one referred to in the preceding paragraph] "crushed beneath him and, I think, severely bitten. This poet had had an attack of delirium tremens and imagined himself a Bengal tiger. Leaving Marston, he sprang on all fours toward Sharp, but he burst a blood-vessel and collapsed on the floor. Sharp lifted him on to the sofa, took Marston into another room, and then rushed hatless through the streets to the hospital that was around the corner. The surgeon in charge, himself drunk and seeing Sharp covered with blood, insisted on giving him in charge as a murderer; Sharp, always a delicate man, fainted. The poet was dead of hemorrhage before assistance reached him.

"But in the gloom and horror they sang on bravely of Lancelot and Guinevere, Merlin and Vivien, ballads of Staffs and Scrips, of music and moonlight. They did not—that is to say—much look at the life that was around them; in amid the glooms they built immaterial pleasure-houses. They were not brave enough—that, I suppose, is why they are very few of them remembered, and few of them great."

"It is a chastening thing," writes Rebecca West in the *New Statesman*, "to turn up the Yellow Book and note that at least 75 per cent of the work of those people who believed that they were bringing style to England was styleless balderdash. . . . They loved writing; they thought and talked of nothing else; they stretched themselves on the rack of conscientiously irregular habits because they believed it was good for their work; heroically they trod the Mystic Way to the dogs; and yet they could do nothing better than this stilted fiddling with words, this laborious manufacture of vast paper frills to decorate the minutest possible cutlet of an idea. In their heart of hearts they must have known it was all wrong."

That last statement is extremely questionable. What they did know was that they did not like the world they lived in, and wanted nothing to do with it. They were right enough in disliking that world. It was a world which was treading its own Mystic Way to the dogs—preparing stupendously for the catastrophe of 1914. The old hopes by which idealists could reconcile themselves to being fallen on evil times—these hopes were extinct. But because they loathed the world about them, these idealists who were powerless to conceive of changing that world were thrown back upon a belief in themselves. They were, indeed, permitted for a time to do whatever they pleased so long as they let the real world alone. And they found their own personal lives devoid of significance, except as a fleeting succession of sensations which could be tasted and savored by those of "palate fine."

Life as such a succession of exquisite sensations had its philosopher in the austere recluse, Walter Pater. But there was implicit in the art-for-art's-sake movement something neither austere nor secluded—something which yearned

to express its contempt for the outside world, and more than that, to find reflected in the lurid anger of the outside world a significance which mere sensation was unable by itself to furnish. This exhibitionistic impulse might express itself either in diabolism intended to outrage, or in eccentric manners intended merely to "*épater*" the bourgeoisie. And in any event what was sought was an evaluation of their lives which a philosophy that held life to be meaningless was powerless to give.

And so it was another writer whom the public finally came to regard as the representative of estheticism—simply because it was he who most flamboyantly thrust it upon their attention. Oscar Wilde was representative precisely of this flamboyancy, this lurid advertising of a difference between his ideals and those of the world in which he lived. He walked down Piccadilly—not, as he is palely caricatured in Gilbertian light opera, "with a poppy or a lily in his medieval hand," but carrying a sunflower. A poppy or a lily would have been just medieval enough to seem not at all strange to London—hardly more so than an equally medieval

rose. The sunflower was chosen because it was what ordinary people called a weed; and the new sensations which the cult of estheticism brought to the shocked attention of the public were selected upon the same principle—their irreconcilable differentness from those upon which society had placed its approval.

The scandal and disgrace with which this particular career ended, makes it difficult, without offense, to link it with others which belong psychologically in a common category; but it may be said that the abnormality for which Wilde was imprisoned is temperamentally akin to queernesses not at all indictable nor in any ordinary moral sense disreputable, but which yet constitute a group of emotional states upon the extremer edge of which not merely abnormality, but insanity, may be found.

It is perilous to be cut off from community of thought with the world to which one belongs; in so far as this alienation may be forced upon sensitive minds by the conditions of a culture hostile to creative dreaming, it is a misfortune. The habituation to, and finally the temperamental preference for such alienation is a more

dangerous matter. In so far as its origins are social and psychic, it is the final result which may be traced in literature of the social hopelessness which we have found in our historical enquiry filling the nineteenth century.

It is the final renunciation of relations with a world felt to be intolerable; a spiritual divorce from reality. In this mood, the artist does not quarrel with the world, nor laugh at it, nor, least of all, seek to persuade it that its realities are poorer than his own dreams; in this mood, the unhappy one does not even leave the world, and seek refuge in cave or garret or "ivory tower"; he remains in but not of the world, utterly content with the realm of his own dreaming.

It is a mood so far past despair that it has in it a kind of smugness; but we can follow it in literature only so far as it flings to the world in disdain or pity or defiance some record of itself—only, in fact, so long as it remains aware of the existence of the real world outside. This is the last frontier of literature, the stepping-off place into the realm of madness—of private and incommunicable dream.

# *Part Two:* A Spiritual Autobiography of My Own Generation in Its Literary and Social Aspects

If the shoe fits, wear it.—*Old Proverb.*

## Chapter I

## *Youth's Pilgrimage*

PICKING UP THE PIECES—SCIENCE AND JULES VERNE—THEOLOGY AND BOB INGERSOLL—AMERICAN REBELS—"FREEDOM, TO WHAT?"

WE have seen what the literature of the nineteenth century meant to those for whom it was written. What that literature meant to us, for whom it was not written, but upon whom it was thrust, is quite another matter. It meant, to many of us, almost nothing at all.

It was an intrusion of the past into our lives—an intrusion which most of us regarded as we did the garrulous reminiscences of a member of the older generation, at a time when we wanted to go outdoors and play. It was something to be respected, tolerated, endured—but it was a nuisance.

We had our own lives to live—and all these classical utterances of nineteenth-century literature had no relation to our lives. From the stormy mouthings of Byron to the sanctimonious solemnities of Tennyson, they were a bore.

It is not, of course, universally true that of the books of the past none had the power to reach into our lives and light them with more than a momentary and evanescent significance. Some rays from those broken lights did pierce, not dimly, into individual lives here and there —it might be the strenuous courage of Browning, the single-minded devotion to beauty of Keats, or something more remote and vivid still, a wind-blown tang of Elizabethan adventurousness, or a glimpse of the clear pagan loveliness of Sappho, coming to us like the sight of a naked wood-nymph to a plowboy, making us wonder and dream. But these were solitary visions; what we most of all instinctively sought was lacking—

*"Some common wave of thought and joy*
*Lifting mankind again."*

We were of the present. And, though we did not realize it, what we wanted was an interpretation of our own time—an interpretation which would make us feel its significance, and the significance of our own part in it.

We were young, and the world in which we lived was the only world we knew. How could we understand the tempestuous hatred and weary doubt with which our fathers and their fathers before them had seen the emergence and development of this modern world?

We had no memories and no doubts with which to criticize the spectacle of this modern world, and instinctively we looked forward into it with confidence and belief. We felt that it was good. But we wanted to know why it was good.

And to this question of ours, the literature of the nineteenth century furnished no reply. The determined optimism of Browning was likely to seem to us a little silly, the sentimentalism of Dickens more than a little blithering. These were cheer for griefs we had never felt, consolations of which we did not understand the occasion. While as for the books of that

past which formally and consciously undertook to teach their readers the meaning of life, they simply bewildered us. What was Carlyle so angry about? And what was Ruskin trying to get at, anyway? *

We did not know. Generally we did not care.

We wanted, though we did not realize it, a literature of our own—books produced by, for and out of the age in which we lived. But there were, quite literally, no such books. The truth was, of course, that in the time when we

* "Another of the strange and evil tendencies of the present day is to the decoration of the railway station. Now, if there be any place in the world in which people are deprived of that portion of temper and discretion which are necessary to the contemplation of beauty, it is there. It is the very temple of discomfort, and the only charity that the builder can extend to us is to show us, plainly as may be, how soonest to escape from it. The whole system of railroad travelling is addressed to people who, being in a hurry, are therefore, for the time being, miserable. No one would travel in that manner who could help it. . . . It transmutes a man from a traveller into a living parcel. For the time being he has parted with the nobler characteristics of his humanity. . . . Do not ask him to admire anything. . . . There never was a more flagrant nor impertinent folly than the smallest portion of ornament in anything concerned with railroads or near them. Keep them out of the way, take them through the ugliest country you can find, confess them the miserable things they are . . ."—*The Seven Lamps of Architecture.*

were growing up, the human imagination was a chaos, filled with the wreckage of a century-long conflict of which we were unaware, between Utopian ideals and machine-made facts. That huge shattering of human hopes against the barrier of economic circumstances, a hundred years before, and that later mid-century collision in the realm of thought between theological optimism and scientific pessimism, had left the world of imagination in a state of confusion in which it was impossible for a while to do anything except pick up the pieces. And that is what the writers of our youth were doing—picking up little pieces of theological optimism and little pieces of scientific pessimism. We were living in the débris of an age that had gone spiritually to smash.

Nevertheless, in our childhood, there was Jules Verne. He gave us a vision of the splendors of scientific achievement, of the mind triumphing over the stubborn limitations of our earthly environment. We were ready to believe in this age in which we lived as an age in which Science was magnificently remaking the world.

But there was no such interpretation offered —by any one except the immortal Jules! And if we looked about us at the world, we saw why. Science was cutting up frogs in the laboratory, and stringing our towns with electric wires. It was not re-making the world; it was merely producing a variety of conveniences. And the most notable of these conveniences, the modern bathroom, was a symbol of the quality of its achievement. Here was nothing to arouse the lyricism of youth. Even the automobile, which began to appear on our streets, was not exactly a thing to stir the imagination. It was odd, it was efficient, but it was not a sign of the triumph of Science; it did not transcend the familiar world; it was merely what it seemed, a horseless carriage, and it could do nothing that a horse and buggy couldn't do—it could only do it more quickly. . . .

And, of course, there was Bob Ingersoll. He was not forced upon us as part of our education by the authorities, and perhaps for that reason we found him interesting. He revealed to us somewhat of the battle that had been

fought before we were born, between, as we understood it, Darwin and the Priests. And hearing of that battle, we placed ourselves, characteristically enough, on the side of Darwin. We were for the present, and against the past.

There were some things we did not understand about that battle. It had been won, we were assured, by Darwin. And yet, it sometimes seemed, when we looked at the world about us, that the defeat had not been quite decisive. The theologians had apparently recovered from the defeat magnificently; and if one listened to an occasional itinerant evangelist, it would seem that the victory had been the other way about.

And so some of us took up the struggle anew. Not quite openly—for we found that our opinions were considered scarcely less than criminal by our families, teachers and friends. Even so, our secret heresy had all the charm that youth naturally finds in illicit adventure. We were few, but we felt all the more heroic in our fewness. And here and there was an utterly solitary, and very defiant and bitter, agnostic. We nourished our imaginations upon

the fiery prose of Ingersoll; finding sometimes the greatness of Shelley's poetry in the fact that he, too, was an Atheist; linking our solitary rebellions with the grandeur and pathos of Copernicus, of Giordano Bruno, of unknown martyrs in all ages. . . .

But the satisfaction of hating a tyrannical God in whom one does not after all believe, grows stale. And the happier we, if that phase of our intellectual career came to an end before we established contact with the select group of elderly town Atheists, who met in the back of some cigar store to read esoteric works of anti-clericalism, and to relate with solemn naïveté the story that every convent had a stock of guns in its cellar, awaiting the signal for a religious massacre. These fellow Atheists of ours, alas, were not Shelleys, nor Giordano Brunos. They were as superstitious, as dogma-ridden, as pious in their reverence for their own intellectual deities, as incapable of independent or critical thought, as any set of church members could have been. They were in fact a little church, saved by the gospel of Ingersoll; no less devout sectarians for being mem-

bers of the sect of Heresy. And if by chance one of them were not a religious crank, his conversation nevertheless bore unmistakably the impress of an older and outworn generation of thought. Here was nothing to fire the mind, nothing to interpret the meaning of To-day, nothing to show a road into the future—nothing, in short, to serve the purposes of Youth. All this quarrel belonged to the past. Atheism was a dead issue.

Again—it may be from some linking of Kings with Priests in the Atheistic ritual of anathema—we stumbled upon the idea of Freedom, and were ready to give our young enthusiasm to its service.

In the literature of our own country, there was a mass of libertarian eloquence—the speeches of Wendell Phillips, the fiery Abolitionist poems of Whittier, the dithyrambs of Walt Whitman in celebration of the individual, the burning advice of Emerson to be uncompromising, the invective of Thoreau upon the spirit of social conformity—a veritable arsenal of swordlike thoughts with which to fit youth out for its first struggles with what-

ever tyrannies of traditional society it might meet.

But the authorities did not want us to have weapons against social tyrannies, and none of these—literally, none—had been given to us in the schools. Wendell Phillips was to us merely a name in the history lesson. Whittier was known to us only as the author of an extremely long poem about Snow, and two sentimental ballads—never as the angry writer of such lines as—

*"Woe to the priesthood! woe*
*To those whose hire is with the price of blood—*
*Perverting, darkening, changing as they go*
*The searching truths of God.*

*"Feed fat, ye locusts, feed;*
*And in your tasseled pulpits thank the Lord,*
*That from the toiling bondman's utter need*
*Ye pile your own full board!"*

Walt Whitman was by these same educational authorities considered too indecent an author to be quoted; or if he did appear, it

was as the Good Gray Poet, and the author of "O Captain! My Captain!" Emerson was a Philosopher (whatever that was) and the author of a very silly little poem about a Mountain and a Squirrel. And Thoreau, the stubborn Anarchist who went to jail rather than pay his poll-tax, was known only as a "Nature-Lover"!

The educational authorities did not want us to know the truth about this American literature. They were afraid that the real Emerson and Thoreau and Phillips and Whittier and Whitman would corrupt our young minds. So we were left to discover them for ourselves —which all too frequently we failed to do.

For there stood, in the way of our approach to this fiery part of our literature, the familiar monument of the Civil War. In our earliest childhood we had sat on father's or grandfather's knee and heard their own heroic adventures in that war. Later we had cheered parades of Grand Army veterans, and listened to Fourth of July orators, dinning that heroism into our young ears. Then we had to learn it all over again at school.

Too much heroism palls. We heard so much about the Civil War in those early years that we thought we never wanted to hear about anything connected with it again. The fact that this part of American literature had something to do with Slavery was enough to scare us away from it.

It is possible that the educational authorities were unduly alarmed, after all. For when we discovered fragments of this literature by our own enterprise, it was not easy to apply it to our own lives. These men had been Destroyers—fierce antagonists of a Compromise between free capitalism and a slave system. It is true that the agitation against negro slavery was related to a broader movement against a more widespread form of economic bondage. It is true that the kind of Freedom which Thoreau and Emerson wrote about was a freedom far surpassing that promised by the Emancipation Proclamation. But we did not know these things, and there was none to tell us. We could read these books and emerge with minds unscathed by their fiery content. Many of us did read Emerson without discovering his sig-

nificance; for he was the counselor of a kind of perfection too easily, in our ignorance, to be identified with the more familiar sorts of "character-building" platitudes.

Whitman, more fortunately, was one who could not be so misunderstood. But he came bearing many gifts, and among that strange riches we chose according to our desire. It would not be true to say that we found in Whitman what we wished to find; but among so many startling and contradictory revelations, it was easy enough to reject what we did not want. He was the great Liberator. He freed us—from whatever chains most irked.

But—"I ask," says Nietzsche, "not freedom *from* what, but freedom *to* what?"

We were spiritual vagrants, seeking the true road. If we paused in doubt at the beginning of some new path, Walt Whitman appeared to us saying, "Do not be afraid, camerado. It is a good path, and there are some fine ripe berries and a cool spring or two further on. Go ahead! You will probably run across me again some time, and if there is anything I can do for you, you can count on me. So long!"—and

he gave us a hearty clap on the back, and left us.

But where were we going? Pilgrims on an unknown pilgrimage, we wandered through those adolescent years, seeking a leader who would take charge of the expedition. Sometimes we felt that it was a journey of exploration and discovery; and sometimes we knew we were simply lost in the woods. Some of us made back tracks for Home, and found the voting of Father's ticket or the taking of Mother's advice a sufficient exercise of our powers for social good or evil. . . . But this is the story of those who wandered, seeking understanding of themselves and of the mysteries of life.

## Chapter II

# *We Stop at a Persian Tavern*

GOSPELS FOR YOUTH—DARWINIAN DETERMINISM WITH VINE-LEAVES IN ITS HAIR

THERE was perhaps one book out of all the literature of the past which had a universal currency among us, one poem which had a real meaning to us all—a meaning so thoroughly conned at the time, so turned over and over in our young minds, so deeply and thrillingly and exhaustingly felt, that it is difficult for us to remember it without weariness or amusement. It is like our boyhood's favorite tune, or our first experience in calf-love: it meant too much to us then to mean anything at all to us now.

Nevertheless, the poignant philosophy of that book, that poem, was woven inextricably into the fabric of our youth. That book, that

poem, was Fitzgerald's "Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám."

It would have seemed ironic enough to any of the Victorian Great if they could have known in the year 1858 that none of their works were destined to rival in the interest of the next generation that little book lying unsold on the twopence stalls—that not any of their profundities or braveries or consolations were to be such a gospel to eager and troubled youth as its pages could furnish. And that fact is a phenomenon well worth looking into.

The secret of the spell which this book cast upon the imagination of the late nineteenth century can be found in the fact betrayed by its title—the fact that the West had exhausted its spiritual energy in the vain effort to answer the riddle of life, and it had turned to hear what the East had to utter out of its vaster disillusionment.

The East had replied in effect: The answer is that there is no answer. Life is a meaningless illusion. In the end, as in the beginning, is Nothing.

If we translate this statement into terms of Western theology, it means simply that there is no Heaven and no Hell; that the present moment is all. And if we translate it again into the idiom of social idealism, it means that the idea of a social Hereafter which had tormented the nineteenth-century imagination was illusion: Utopia but a vision of fulfilled desire, and men's worst fears for the future but the reflection of their own bad consciences. . . .

It is no accident that men should have given up the idea of a future life at the same time that they gave up their hopes and fears for anything better or worse to come than capitalism. It was but "striking from the calendar unborn To-Morrow." Nor was it an accident that they should have renounced, under quasi-scientific sanction, the burden of personal responsibility for their actions, at a time when their economic conduct seemed to have lost the last shreds of ancient theological justification —when it seemed to be for neither the greater good of man nor the greater glory of God.

In a variety of forms which have left no adequate record in literature—in theosophies and bastard creeds with strange and silly technical terminologies—and in the high seats of philosophy, the Oriental quietism gained adherents. But in this quietism there were different moods for different minds.—If life is a painful illusion, and Nirvana the goal to be desired, it might seem that the believers in this doctrine would take advantage of their freedom from responsibility for their actions, and attain their goal by suicide. But something in human nature, even in the East, balks at so stringent a working out of the mathematics of this creed. Even Schopenhauer, who accepted the Eastern doctrine in so faithful a form, was content to endure existence with stoic fortitude. But there were other ways than stoic endurance of pain which are opened up by the theory of personal irresponsibility; having realized that nothing matters, one might as well endure Pleasure!

*"Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring*
*Your winter-garment of Repentance fling."*

For the first time in the history of Western idealism, it was possible to live a life of worldly pleasure with complete philosophical dignity. Horace had only set the stern old Epicurean stoicism to a gay tune. Medieval students had sung:

*"Some think this world is made for fun and folly*
*And so do I!"*

—or words to that effect in Latin doggerel. But they were only indulging in the privilege of youth to jest about serious matters. Byron had mocked at our human falling from the old ideals of duty, rather than at the ideals themselves; fundamentally, he was a strict, old-fashioned moralist, ashamed of his own derelictions. And Shelley wanted to abolish the old code of morality only in order to establish a new and more rigorous one. But duty had been abolished by despair, and despair itself was free to put off its tragic robes and join the "guests star-scattered on the grass."

In this mood, out of the wisdom of the East,

Fitzgerald set before the Western world the vain pageant of its life.

*"We are no other than a moving row*
*Of magic Shadow-shapes that come and go . . ."*

Life, Death and Love—all vanity: but why be sad about it? Myself when young did eagerly discuss the implications of Darwinism. But what do these implications matter to us? We are what Natural Selection has made us. We are the Clay which Evolution shapes to its own purposes. And if we seem shaped ill—

*"What! Did the Hand, then, of the Potter shake?"*

It was the tender and melancholy music of Fitzgerald's phrases which gave beauty to these ideas; but it was the utter philosophical sincerity, the completeness and candor with which they set forth a view of life, that gave power to the phrases. It was a call to youth, troubled with questionings about life, to trouble no

more. With such eloquence and tenderness did Fitzgerald's Omar describe the weary circle of adolescent thought, so gently did he mock at the uselessness of thinking, so seductively did he weave every hue of warm earthly loveliness into his garland of flowers to crown the head of careless revelry, that youth must needs enter into his enchanted garden of forgetfulness. . . .

It need not be imagined that Omar, or Fitzgerald, seduced young men into overmuch dalliance with either wine or women, not to speak of song. For all these things belong to the world of reality, the painful world of reality, which it is the mission of Oriental philosophy even in Omarian vein to teach us to renounce. It was the unphilosophic tribe, the robustly illusioned ones who were able to enjoy unthinkingly the commonplace gifts of life—it was these who really carried out Omar's injunctions, usually without having heard of Omar. But as for imaginative youth—no: it was usually to a realm of purely fanciful revelry that Omar introduced his young readers: to a world in which women and wine are a symbol of forgetfulness—a world of dreams.

The spell of Omar was at last broken for us; perhaps by hearing his vinous rhymes quoted at some sad café gathering of middle-aged persons (or so they seemed to us then) who had quite realistically applied "drink and wimmen" as a salve to egoisms bruised in the actual struggle of life, and who used the Omarian philosophy as an adventitious aid to the process—seeking to induce by the charm of its tinkling music the rosy glow which real alcohol was too often by itself unable to cast over their essentially monotonous diversions. . . .

The world-weariness of youth is just a little disgusted by the weariness of the worldly; and though we felt infinitely aged and infinitely wise, we were nevertheless a thousand years too young to listen with any patience to the sophistication of the disappointed forties. We left Omar in the café among these stragglers from life's battlefield, and passed on.

But we had already found the Omarian philosophy inadequate as a guide to the enjoyment of the pleasures which most of all appealed to us, the pleasures of Love. We were prepared to forget in its Intoxication the

whole Wrangle of the Sects. But Love, contrary to the Omarian formula, was less an Intoxication than a new and a worse Wrangle. It was the subject matter of a debate more endless than the old debates about Life and Death. If these were difficult to understand, Woman was no less so.

"And Thou beside me, singing, in the Wilderness"—yes, but upon which terms did She, whose presence was so necessary to the lovely scene, consent to come? Scarcely upon the terms suggested by the Omarian philosophy of not taking things too seriously!

The actual women of the time, at least those with whose conversation a philosopher would not become bored after a very few minutes, were demanding that they be taken very seriously indeed. The world, it seemed, was full of Modern Women. Perhaps that was because we particularly sought them out, and encouraged their bewildering existence by our bewildered attentions. Indeed, different as they were from the docile kind of feminine loveliness envisaged by Omar, and though their companionship was less in the nature of a Cup of

Wine than of an obscure mathematical puzzle, when once we had discovered them we lost our taste for mere easy and unadventurous thirst-quenching femininity. "Ah, call it Whisky and be done with it!" we might have said, in the words of an Omarian parodist. We had sought escape from intellectual and spiritual struggle in the companionship of the other sex, only to find ourselves involved in a more poignant intellectual and spiritual struggle—the struggle to understand the humanness of women; and we seemed to like it! If women were not troublesomely modern, we sought to make them so. We came to loose our fingers in the tresses of some cypress-slender Minister of Wine, and remained to perplex her against her will with the tangled problems of To-morrow. When she was not discontented with the limitations of law and tradition upon her human personality, we endeavored to convince her that she should be—a rash proceeding which was destined to increase the complexity and the pain of our own problems later on!

## Chapter III

# *We Attend an Ibsen Play*

MODERN YOUNG WOMEN—THE GIRL AND THE MACHINE —THE GLORIOUS PLAYFELLOW

IT needed, it seemed, but a word or two, out of a book or newspaper—and not least preferably from the lips of some young male idealist—to turn what had been perfect pictures of Victorian domestic femininity into (as it must have seemed to their fathers and mothers) raging and irresponsible monsters of modernism, who must forthwith go off to college, out to work, into a profession, on to the stage, over to a settlement house, with doubtless worse in prospect.

We flattered ourselves with the thought that, if we were not exactly the Frankensteins who had created these new beings, yet it was the impulse of the ideas which we expressed that mo-

tivated their insurgent activities. We realized that there must have been, smoldering behind that placid Victorian parlor-picture which they had first presented to our gaze, a fund of resentment, of irritation, of suppressed hostile criticism, against the petty tyrannies and injustices of their home life and of their traditional lot. But we supposed that it was the larger vision which our generalizations had furnished them, that resolved their secret discontent into overt rebellion.

And it was indeed, perhaps, the technical phraseology which we provided, that gave them the courage to denounce their wrongs. For discontents which can only be stated in the domestic vernacular, are, so far as a woman knows, evidences of a peculiar disposition in herself which had best be concealed. But wrongs which have attained the dignity of a technical vocabulary of their own, constitute a Cause. Our feministic terminology was a reputable medium for the utterance of old grudges and new ambitions; and the eagerness with which these young rebels took up our phrases left us no reason to suppose that their

conception of the goal of feminist aspirations was not the same as ours.

Nevertheless, their feminism and ours were unconsciously different, and that difference is of some importance in the social developments of the time. It can be shown in many things upon which we supposed we agreed with each other: but it can perhaps be shown most simply in what we thought—or rather felt—about Ibsen's Nora.

In that strange Norwegian poet who used our contemporary joys and sorrows and misadventures as symbols of his own far-seeing hopes and somber fears, there was a strain of happy and of tragic prophecy. He believed, and yet disbelieved, in the individualism which was the dominant quality of his age. Sometimes he pictured the individual as freeing himself, heroically and triumphantly, from the restraining influence of the social mass; sometimes as wrecking the common happiness of that social mass in insane efforts to achieve such freedom. Even so, he admired the spirit of individualism—but as one admires Fire. He put into concrete domestic drama, as Goethe

had done at the beginning of the century into cloudy fable in his "Faust," the proud, reckless, tragic, splendid career of the triumphant bourgeoisie. But to us at least, his darker symbols of foreboding were, as yet, mysterious, if not quite meaningless. We could not quite understand his Heddas, his Brands, his Master Builders. But we could understand his Nora, and she became for us the symbol of Woman in Revolt.

When Nora went out, slamming the door behind her, we all applauded. But we who were young male idealists applauded a different thing than did those of us who were young feminine insurgents.

*"The toad beneath the harrow knows*
*Exactly where each tooth-point goes"*

—a thing which even the moralist upon the road who preaches rebellion to the toad, doesn't know.

These young women who saw themselves in Nora knew—and it has taken us male idealists all this time to find out—that Nora had put up with all the masculine authoritarianism she

could stand. She had been willing to be a Doll in a Doll's House as long as it worked; she was willing to charm the idle moments of a superior and infinitely wise being as long as he could function effectively as such. But he had lost his place of superiority, demonstrated himself a fool, and what is worse, a coward; and she was prepared to step in and help run things. The one thing she couldn't stand was his still pretending to be the boss. So she walked out of the door, intending first of all to fit herself, by a human instead of a "doll" training, to share in a responsibility which he was clearly unfit to bear alone. Maybe she would come back. That *maybe* meant: if he puts off those ridiculous and offensive masculine airs of superiority.

That was what Nora meant to the young women whom we took to see "A Doll's House." They had learned the secret of masculine inefficiency long before, and they were fed up with the male's preposterous airs of superiority. They had stood from fathers and brothers and male acquaintances and wooers all of that sort of thing they thought they could stand. Their

egotism was in revolt against the too easy method of getting their way by flattering the egotism of the male. They wanted to get out of a man-dominated realm. And so they applauded when Nora left home.

It was only later, when this feminist idealism began to solidify into the great political movement of "votes for women," and to manifest itself in the economic field as a demand for "equal pay for equal work," that we began to suspect the truth. We were annoyed by what seemed to us (though we gallantly denied the possibility of such a thing) an anti-masculine flavor in this later feminist spirit. And we were amused by what appeared to be the disproportionate anger with which women who did not like to smoke in private met the fact that they could not smoke in public. It was not man that they were hostile to, but that masculine authoritarianism which is nearly coextensive with our sex. It was not the masculine cigarette they wanted so much as the abrogation of the masculine right to boss women around and tell them what they should and should not do.

They were come to the second stage of their revolt, in which they realized by experience what had been in the books for them to see, but what they had never really thought to be the case, that not the home alone is dominated by masculine arrogance, but that this is as a whole, most tremendously and offensively, a "man-made world."

But of all this we never dreamed. Our feelings about Nora were quite different. We knew pretty much what kind of world it was Nora was going out into. We were there in that world ourselves. We didn't like it. We didn't think it glorious that we earned our own living. We knew that earning a living was likely to be a rather commonplace and a rather nasty affair. We knew that the thing which was sending girls by the hundreds of thousands out of the home into the shops and factories was not idealism, but necessity. We knew that capitalism was breaking up the old-fashioned home, and using its feminine inmates for purposes of its own, which had the future of the race least of all at heart. We knew that women in industry were hideously exploited,

and that they would have to fight inch by inch, as men had fought, for breathing-space in it. . . . And yet we idealized this process; we praised it. We believed in it as a means of the regeneration of the social scheme.

That was because (*a*) it was actually going on; and (*b*, *c*, *d* . . . *x*, *y*, *z*) for various other reasons; but chiefly because it was going on. We were the children of Darwinism; we believed that the present is better than the past, and the future the justification of the present. Woman-in-industry was an economic fact, and sacred as such. It was only as a process made up of such facts that we could envisage Progress. This was the "struggle for existence," this was "natural selection," and out of it should come, inevitably, a new breed of womankind, splendidly fit . . . for what?

Doubtless, if we had had these ideas consciously instead of unconsciously in mind, we would have said—fit to survive in such a struggle. The Darwinian theory, in its rashest social analogue, promised us no more than that. At the best, it said: the sheltered female may

not be able to stand the racket, but cheer up—woman will adapt herself, and survive!

But just as our Darwinism was unconscious, so was it sentimental. In the dark background of our minds it had become inextricably confused with the vestiges of Utopian hope of which nothing could quite rob us. And so—what our fathers and grandfathers would have been quite unable to comprehend—we liked, we approved, we desired, we idealized the result of this process of adaptation. We were likely to conceive of Her of the Future in Whitmanesque terms:

*"They are not one jot less than I am,*
*They are tanned in the face by shining suns and blowing winds,*
*Their flesh has the old divine suppleness and strength,*
*They know how to swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run, strike, retreat, advance, resist, defend themselves,*
*They are ultimate in their own right—they are calm, clear, well-possessed of themselves."*

These qualities, the gifts of a pioneer or of an aristocratic stage of culture so far as the world had offered them to our view, we did not doubt to be the ultimate and universal reward to womankind of the machine-process to which they had begun to surrender themselves. . . .

But the mills of the gods grind slowly, and our Utopian desires looked for some immediate results from this process which would commend the new womankind to our fancy. And we found what we wanted in the most obvious and indubitable and first result of that process. It threw woman freely into our company.

We had chafed against the shelter to which the vestigial feudalism of the Home subjected her, and the artificial narrowing of her personality and activities by such an institution. We wanted her as a Companion. We wanted her, no doubt, more as the companion of our play than of our work; but it was truly in learning to work with us that she learned for the first time to play with us. She now played with us, that is to say, upon our own accustomed masculine terms. She became like us, like what the world we worked in had made us, for good

or ill—more interested in ideas, more honest, and less finicking. Our Victorian ancestresses would have said that she had become, like us, coarsened. But we liked her.

The difference between the masculine and the feminine idealists of this period is now apparent. We were content with what was happening to woman because what we wanted was something for ourselves—a Glorious Playfellow. . . . But they wanted something different—something for *themselves*. They wanted freedom only as a means to the increased satisfaction of a self-respect—or an egotism, if you will—too long cramped and chafed by masculine rule. They wanted Happiness—the happiness that comes from being a freely expressive and largely active personality. And they did not find it in the outside world into which they had so confidently burst—not at college, nor in the professions, nor on the stage, nor in settlement work. We had not expected that they would. We thought they would be content with the joy of struggle. But they needed the joy of achievement.

We might never have discovered the dis-

couragement which underlay their courage, if it had not been that they failed to find what they wanted, not only in all those other places, but also in their association with us! It was bad enough to find themselves still inferiors battling for their right to exist in the world of work; but when they found themselves still at a disadvantage in the world of play—that was too much.

In this age of feminine achievement in everything from tennis to flying, that may seem absurd: but think back to the beginnings of this feminine doughtiness, and you will find in that early chagrin the origin of this enterprise. . . . It was no comfort to be able to dance unwearied until morning; they had always been able to do that, and there was no relish in such a medieval triumph. What counted was what men could do—argue till morning, for instance, or even play poker till morning. Oh, the secret humiliation of having dozed off at 2 A.M. in the midst of a very enlightening discussion of Whistler or the Single-Tax!

But out of this shame, tutored by the new honesty which they had learned, came a deep

questioning of the validity of our masculine ideas. It was simply the old situation over again—we were running things, as usual. And perhaps at the heart of this ancient masculine authoritarianism there was the ancient masculine bluff! Perhaps the things we men thought important were not so important. Perhaps—a profound "perhaps"—their emotions about their situation were truer than our ideas, their disappointment more significant than our approval.

Perhaps there was not so very much fun in being a modern woman after all. And perhaps it was *our* fault.

When they succeeded at last in making these thoughts articulate, when they battered down our glorious long-term generalizations with immediate prosaic facts—when they pointed out that, no matter what you said, women had the hardest row to hoe, and that we weren't doing a damn thing to make it easier—when this happened, our masculine feminism began, sadly, to part company with theirs.

For although we sat up and listened, and in reply talked gorgeously about what might be

done to relieve the double burden upon womankind—though we even sketched for them the coöperative apartment houses of the Future (with day and night nurseries, and skilled nurses to take care of the children, since that was what was bothering them!)—and projected timidly, having as yet but the slightest faith in anything but economic processes, a state-pension for mothers: though we brought out our best Words, yet they were not satisfied. . . . They went off by themselves, in Women's Clubs from which we felt hurt to find ourselves excluded, to plot votes for women, factory legislation, and equal pay for equal work.

Some of us insisted on tagging after them and assisting with their plots; but the specifically masculine kind of feminism had a new and independent development, which we will consider a little later.

## Chapter IV

## *We Rally Round the Soap-Box*

A STEP AT A TIME—"LET THE NATION OWN THE TRUSTS"—ANARCHISTS AT PLAY—THE EGO AND ITS OWN—"NO GODS, NO KINGS, NO JEALOUSIES!"

MEANWHILE, we whose hopes for womankind found scope in their political and industrial program, saw those hopes gradually merge into our general political and social program for mankind at large. So far as there were special woman's problems, they must be solved, it seemed to us, not otherwise than by the efforts of women themselves. But on the whole, as it appeared more and more to us, their problems were the same as everybody else's: and the woman's revolt took its place in our imagination as a part of the industrial revolution. They were oppressed; so

was mankind at large. And our thoughts became centered in practical efforts, in politics and economics, for the relief of the world-wide misery produced by capitalism.

Our plans for such relief were usually, at first, of the timidest sort. We had lost the power of conceiving Change in large terms. There had been one appeal to us, one attempt to stimulate our imaginations to such a conception, in the form of a book by Edward Bellamy, called "Looking Backward." This book influenced us where others, such as Ignatius Donnelly's "Cæsar's Column" had failed. That was because Donnelly had pictured Revolution in such romantic and absurd terms. What! violent revolution and bloody counter-revolution, with an accompaniment of famine and massacre! No—such things could not happen. We were too civilized.

Of course we could not take *that* sort of thing seriously. It made an amusing "thriller," but we knew that such a revolution was impossible. Bellamy's book was different. It showed a reign of universal peace and order, in which all the friction of present-day com-

petition had been eliminated by a gigantic combination of industrial processes under the rule of the State; a régime of cleanliness, efficiency and common sense, in which machines did the dirty work, and everybody was enlightened, useful and happy. . . .

This classic of scientific Utopianism had provoked the sketching of a different kind of Utopia by William Morris in his "News From Nowhere"—a quasi-medieval Utopia, with a healthy amount of dirt, disorder and adventure, and with machinery thrown on the scrap-heap. But, so far as we were concerned, it was not the excessive orderliness and mechanical efficiency of this vision of Bellamy's which made it fail to convince us. It was not that we did not think such a state of affairs desirable, but rather that we could not think such a state of affairs possible. It was too good to be true.

It was a beautiful dream—and we had lost the power to believe in dreams.

Therefore it was the milder programs of political and social reform which first won our adherence. We put our trust in a variety of

political expedients under the auspices of new or old parties, and gave an impetus to a series of political pilgrimages, under such leaders as Henry George and Bryan; and as the sum-total of our efforts, we furnished needy politicians with a new kind of political capital—which they proceeded to over-capitalize and boom until the whole reform-business burst in the grand debacle of Rooseveltian "Progressivism." In the economic field we went in for arbitration, profit-sharing, and municipal ownership. In the social field, we went in for organized charity, and social settlement work.

There is a barrier of secret chagrin to be overcome before some of us can travel back in memory to the days when, gloriously confident, we did settlement work or dabbled in "Charity." It was not one of us, it was some one whose mind was filled with thoughts of the more unquestioning and pitying benevolences of the Middle Ages who made up that rhyme about "organized charity, scrimped and iced, in the name of a cautious, statistical Christ." And it was not because it had so much statistics, as because the statistics added up wrong, that

we first began to doubt its value. Was not poverty being created faster than it could possibly be ministered to? And who were we, to undertake the management of others' lives for them? Must the poor, having been robbed of everything else, surrender the direction of their most private affairs to agencies paid by the people who had robbed them? Was charity an insult added to the injury of poverty? So "the poor" were apparently convinced, at any rate. . . .

It was a great moment, for such of us as persevered until we reached such a point, when we ceased to believe in puny mitigations of the struggle between the classes—when we saw that struggle as the very essence of contemporary life, and indeed in one form or another as the essence of all human history. We were the better prepared to accept this view by the teachings of Darwinism; it met with the unconscious approval of minds nourished upon modern science, that such a struggle, with all its cruelty and chaos, should be the origin of a fitter scheme of things. We had only to realize that the working class stood as the protagonist

of the Future, and cast in our lot emotionally with its hosts.

It was a wonderful moment for those of us who made that decision: a moment in which we saw the working class, triumphant over the defenders of capitalism, inaugurating a free and happy commonwealth. . . . But, though there were other wonderful moments for one who had thus become a Socialist, there was never another of just this sort. This particular glory, the glory of the ultimate vision, was to fade away, and leave us very much in the light of common day.

It was, we thought, in the light of common day that we preferred to work. The only question was, What could we do? If we were already engaged in the class struggle, we could use our consciousness of that struggle to direct its crude motions; or at least, we could try. But the trade unions had their own vision of their goal; and despite their temporary fighting moods, it was a sedate and respectable vision. They were shocked at ours. They did not want to overthrow capitalism; they wanted lace curtains and a piano in their homes.

Well, we could not quarrel with that. We agreed well enough with Shelley's practical definition of freedom, which began:

> *"For the laborer, thou art bread*
> *And a comely table spread,*
> *From his daily labor come,*
> *In a neat and happy home."*

Freedom, of course, was also all of the other things set forth by Shelley—justice, and wisdom, and peace, and brotherly love. But it was higher wages and shorter hours first of all. And if the unions were getting these things, and afraid as yet to think about getting anything more, the best thing was perhaps to let them go ahead in their own way. Clearly, they did not want our advice. But they knew where we were to be found when the time came that they did want our wisdom, as necessarily they would.

We were all the while being unconsciously controlled by our quasi-Darwinian idea that evolution required æons of time. We did not dare to think of making a quick job of it. This

was before the day of the I. W. W. and direct action, which, by the way, received their original impetus from other sources than the Socialist movement. We accepted the tempo of the American Federation of Labor as the tempo of industrial change. We adjusted ourselves to the status quo.

We had our own political organization, free from such trammels of political habitude. But the philosophy which underlay our movement forbade us to believe that the Great Change was to be effected by a sweeping conversion of men's minds, or that the gradual conversion in which we were assisting was any other than the reflection of an economic process. We were bringing this process and its effects into the general consciousness. But it was the Process itself which was really to be trusted to realize our desires.

We were economic determinists. And with many of us this determinism amounted to fatalism. Capitalism *must* produce Socialism. We had seen the elaborate syllogism which proved it. We congratulated each other upon our superior knowledge of the trend of events, and

sat about as though we were waiting for the dénouement, when we could say, "I told you so!"

But of course we knew pretty certainly that it was not coming about in our own lifetime. Capitalism must first develop to its utmost limits. There was some room left for such development. Karl Marx had predicted the Trusts, and they had come. Now the Super-Trusts were growing up. That, undoubtedly, was the last stage of capitalism. We watched the development of these enterprises with a jealous parental eye. They were, in a sense, our Trusts; Rockefeller and Morgan might not know it, but they were! When some people proposed to "bust the Trusts," we would have been anxious, had we not been amused. Of course, the Trusts could not be busted—but if they could, what a foolish thing to do! It would only delay the coming of Socialism by just that much. Since they were here, they were inevitable, and if Rockefeller and Morgan had not created them, somebody else would have had to. We were satisfied with the way they were doing it—including even the atroci-

ties with which their agents accentuated the bitterness of the class struggle; and we were willing to keep them on the job.

In one severely practical form, we did indulge our Utopian instincts. We saw that the Trusts and the Nation were becoming—exactly as we had predicted—more and more identical. But this identity manifested itself in the free use of the militia and the courts by the Trusts as weapons against their employees—and against us. We did not like this, in spite of the fact that it was a part of the Latest Stage of Capitalism. So we did not rest content with the fact that the Trusts owned the Nation. We said, "Let the Nation Own the Trusts."

Our original vision of a free and happy Commonwealth had dwindled to a picture of a highly-organized and benevolently-administered State Trust. We saw in the nationalization of industries, and the old-age pensions and factory legislation of various countries, the type of achievement possible to the organized working class: achievements doubtless destined to culminate in the expropriation of the Last Capitalist, in the form

of a payment to him by the State of some Final Dividend. And in the impressive parliamentary representation of the Socialist party in some of those countries—particularly Germany—we saw not only a model for our own efforts, but a guarantee of the peaceful realization of our revolutionary program. . . .

But, at about this time, some of us began to see things differently. What was there, in this program of ours, to get excited about? Why not leave such things to the Reformers? If we really wanted that kind of progress, we could get it more quickly by ceasing to embarrass our respectable friends with our assistance.

But did we really want it? State Capitalism now loomed as the final and worst intrenchment of the forces of the enemy. You could strike against a private employer—you couldn't do even that against the State. The private employer could send troops against you; but the State could put you into uniform, and send you to work under military orders. . . . We had thought to capture the State; would it not be better to destroy it? . . . And all at once, for such of us as I describe, the sarcasm of our

Anarchist friends—and enemies—began to have meaning for us.

Perhaps—we young parliamentarian Socialists began to think—we had been fighting doggedly on the wrong side. If it was the State which was the greatest obstacle to the achievement of human happiness, what were we doing with our parliamentarianism but fostering it? Politics—a delusion and a snare! Let us withdraw from the State at least our moral support. . . . And perhaps—!

But we were not living in the age of Bakunin, and we could not really believe in the possibility of overthrowing the State by force. To begin with, the State had all the force. And further than that, all our instincts were against the use of force. So, for that matter were the instincts of all the Anarchists we knew. There was not a Dynamiter among them; they were gentle, disillusioned, kindly people, who had ceased, like us, to believe in the superstition of State-worship. They had nothing in particular to put in the place of that belief, except a belief which we could not share

—an old, eighteenth-century belief in the natural goodness of the human soul.

We were more disillusioned than they. But we did not try to shake their faith; instead, we let them try to convert us. But they did not try very hard. Perhaps they did not really believe in it very much themselves. They had really only one thing to give us—a warm place in the circle of their kindly disillusion. . . . Out of the ashes of that disillusion was to spring a flame, kindling the fringe of the working class that was furthest from lace curtains and pianos, into a new boldness—syndicalism, the I. W. W. And in England, Anarchist ideals were to unite with medieval memories, in a new Utopianism—Guild Socialism. And all these were to find the test of their seriousness in the emergence of a militant Communist movement. But this was not yet.

One book more than any other served to break for us, who were in this mood, the bonds of sympathy which still held us to the old life of political hopes and plans. That book was Max Stirner's "The Ego and Its Own." It

had nothing to do with the question immediately confronting us. It had nothing to do with economics at all. It had to do with the soul. It was, essentially, a religious tract—a compendium of pious consolations for weary minds; but it was couched in a philosophical dialect calculated to reach our kind of mind. To us, burdened with heavy hopes that had turned to fears about the State, it said: "What has the State to do with you?" It offered to set us free from that obsession—and from all such obsessions. It preached a naked freedom, a beautiful clean unhampered separateness of the soul. . . . And it was pleasant to put off these burdens of old belief. It was a relief not to have to worry about the State any more—nor anything else. It was like leaving a house with many rooms and a servant-problem, to go and live in a small, bare room. . . .

The Ego and its own. What *is* its own? Not these cluttering moralities, bric-a-brac that merely gather the dust, and are so easily knocked off and broken, and yet which occasion such tears of remorse when the inevitable

happens. . . . Out they go! One after another, we threw out of the windows of our soul its accustomed furnishings—the painted ideals, the silly cushions of social comfort, the things we have because everybody else has them. It got to be interesting to see how little a person really needed. Out they went, table, lamp and chair, bed and bedding, and the carpet on the floor. Finally nothing was left—just the Ego, lonely and triumphant. It was a magnificent experience. . . .

Of course we went out a little later and picked up the furniture that, to the scandal and amazement of our neighbors, lay scattered all over the front yard, and brought it back —most of it. And one of the first things we brought back, we masculine ex-Stirnerites at least, was the empty frame in which from time to time had been set first one and then another picture of the Not Impossible She.

We might for a time cease to trouble ourselves about the State; but we could not for long remain untroubled concerning Woman. . . . Max Stirner had offered to free us from the "ghosts" of old traditions and customs and

sentiments; but here was a spirit from whose haunting we would never be freed.

We had gained from our excursion into Anarchism a certain spiritual benefit, not very different from the kind given by a month in a health resort, away from familiar worries; or better still, a lonely climb in the mountains. It had been a spiritual vacation from the real world and its problems, to which we now returned—somewhat invigorated and refreshed, but inevitably to be enmeshed again amidst its complexities.

Stimulated, however, by this brief contact with a surviving relic of eighteenth-century Utopian philosophy, our thoughts upon the subject of woman began to take on a more futuristic tinge.

If we had not been deeply impressed with the Anarchist ideal of a society utterly free from the brutalizing repressions of law, if we were unconvinced of the goodness of human nature when once freed from such repressions, there was nevertheless one aspect of life to which that ideal gave a seductive glamour. Our Anarchist friends themselves had seemed

to lay more stress on the importance of Freedom in the relations of men and women than in the other relations of human society; and however conventional might be their own modes of life, in this as in other respects, yet it was always of their defection from the ideal in this particular that they spoke with the most chagrin. To live on rent, interest and profit, as some of them did, was a matter that lay lightly on the Anarchist conscience; but to have become respectably married to the woman one loved, was a cowardly surrender to the world, which they could hardly forgive themselves. They spoke, sometimes, of "John and Mary," who had been defying convention together now for nigh on sixty years. . . . Reverently, in a hushed voice, as of saints, they spoke of these aged exponents of the freedom of love.

It seemed to us, perhaps, a little humorous, all this pains to get the unfavorable opinion of their neighbors, on the part of a couple who might just as well have enjoyed a public reputation for their utter devotion to each other. More wildly preposterous still seemed the self-mortification of those idealistic couples who

compelled each other to have love-affairs that the other didn't really want, in order to demonstrate that their love was not founded on any vulgar sense of personal possession, and to prove themselves free from the horrid taint of jealousy. . . .

This pious martyrology hardly served to commend to us the principle of freedom which it was supposed to illustrate: it rather alienated us from that principle, by showing us how coercive Freedom could sometimes be. But the principle nevertheless left its impression upon our minds.

## Chapter V

# *We Fall in Love*

MODERN COURTSHIP—THE PROBLEM OF THE HOME—FREE WOMEN—THE BABY QUESTION—THE SCARED YOUNG MALE IDEALIST

OUR masculine ideal of women, at the stage when we last considered it, was the Glorious Playfellow. The development of our ideas on the subject had been proceeding on natural emotional lines. We had liked the newly emancipated self-supporting young woman, because she was comparatively freed from the home and its influences; because she was more with us, and more like us; because she took the shock and jostle of life's incident more bravely, more candidly and more lightly. She did not put an exaggerated and fictitious emphasis upon things. And among the things upon which she did not put such over-empha-

sis, were the incidents of our mutual relationship.

She did not regard the camaraderie of friendship as the symptom of romantic love. She did not have to, and she did not want to. She was too much interested in living. Nor did she take love too seriously; she understood both men and herself too well for that. She was inclined rather to deprecate its potential seriousness, while speculatively tolerating in herself, and in us, a warmth of manner that would have been, in the previous generation, an admission of mutual love which could end only in marriage or the blackest treachery. We were, in fact, finding out, by the trial-and-error process, and without any embarrassing preliminary commitments, just how much of each other's society we could stand. In the back of our minds, no matter how cynical our words or how apparently frivolous our actions, there was the ancient mutual if unconfessed desire for a permanently enduring relationship.

It was a rough, free, wild kind of wooing, which was perhaps not so utterly different from the actualities of Victorian life as from the

chastened pictures of that life presented to us in discreet Victorian fiction: different from those past actualities, that is to say, not so much in form as in environment—for we had a wider and totally unchaperoned world to play together in; different not so much in substance as in attitude—for we had dispensed with the tears, the qualms, the desperation, the remorse, preferring to take more sensibly and with an understanding smile the unpredictable and inconsistent manifestations of a passion which we well knew to be the unstable product of a host of conflicting reasons and impulses; different enough in these respects from the Victorian courtship, but in the end the same. We and they were trying to find our mates.

But here a new aspect of the home opened itself to our young masculine view. We had viewed that institution in the past from the outside, as it were. It was always somebody else's home—our parents' home, or hers. We had now to consider the question of the home from a different angle. We ceased to consider angrily the bars of the cage; we began to notice thoughtfully the amount of expensive gilt

on the bars. We would not perhaps so much have minded carrying off one of these splendid wild creatures, and shutting her up in a prison; we knew she would find a nice comfy prison a not wholly disagreeable change from the inclemency of the free out of doors. We were not really bothered about her. We were bothered about ourselves. The establishment and upkeep of a nice comfy prison is a serious undertaking for a young man—more especially for an idealist, who by definition is innocent of the talent for the more unscrupulous and enterprising kind of economic gain. He hesitates to assume a responsibility which may all too quickly become inescapably sealed with the fact of parenthood. He realizes that the essential fact about the Home, the thing which distinguishes it from the hall-bedroom, the garret and the studio, is that it is a place where one's beloved can, and does, bear and bring up children. It is a disconcerting discovery.

We may suppose this to have been, to the young women themselves, no discovery at all. If they had a different attitude toward motherhood than their Victorian ancestresses, it was

in conceiving it as not so much the crown and glory of a woman's life as one of the most interesting of its adventures. It had its difficulties, its penalties, but so did every other kind of adventure in a lesser degree. It was indubitably a more serious kind of adventure. You could go into a profession, knowing that you could drop it whenever it got tiresome. But you couldn't have babies, and drop them whenever they got tiresome; and you knew that they *would* get tiresome. Perhaps some day things would be arranged so that a mother needn't be so tied down to her children: but it wasn't that way now, and it would get pretty monotonous. It was unfair that modern life should put so high a price on the adventure of motherhood. But they did not intend to be bluffed out of the adventure by however high a price. They wanted babies.

All would have been well enough if they had been generally content—as they were, in many cases—to accept the flattering attentions of young men, or men not so young, who were sufficiently unidealistic and hence unscrupulously enterprising in the field of economic gain

to be in a position to provide the comforts of a domestic prison. But some of them were not content.

They had been out in the world, and learned to be a boon companion to men. They found that the men who were more interested in success than in ideas had but the slightest capacity for boon companionship—at least with women. Besides, these men did not want a boon companion for a wife. They wanted some one who could cheer them up after business hours. They wanted a wife who could at least in dramatic pretense give a good imitation of the earlier Nora, in the doll stage of her career, whenever it was required.

Moreover, these successful men, who were successful by virtue of a certain delimitation of imagination, were incapable of understanding and sympathizing with a modern woman in this matter of the restriction of their freedom by motherhood. She didn't mind so much having to give up her freedom if the man understood. But these available husbands didn't even want to understand. It hurt their egotism to think of there being anything that a woman

wanted that they couldn't give her. But what if they did give her nursemaids; they couldn't —or wouldn't—ever help her back to the old free adventurous life in the world outside the home. They couldn't give her that, and so they refused to entertain seriously the idea that she wanted it. They were willing to do anything for her to make her happy, but she had to agree to be happy with what they were willing to do for her.

Perhaps such young women had gained, in those years of companionship with us, a taste for the specific kind of companionship which we unsuccessful idealists could provide. We offered them sympathy and understanding, and in their gratitude for this they forgave us our failure to offer more. Besides, they had learned to be candid, and they could not stand living with men they had to pretend to all the time. They wanted in their husbands the kind of young idealism that we had.

In fact, they wanted *us*.

We wanted them. We were hurt, as by a betrayal of loyalty, whenever one of them did marry a successful business man and retire from

our jocund midst. But seldom did we try to prevent her going by anything so forthright and unequivocal as a realistic discussion of a home in the essential, expensive and baby-sheltering sense. We talked of how romantically beautiful it would be to go adventuring through life together, but we didn't specifically and emphatically include the adventure of parenthood. When we talked of babies, it was in some large, vague, eugenic way—as though they were interesting theories—and in round numbers, thousands of them at a time, but never particularly of one of our own. . . .

It was at this juncture that masculine idealism came to our aid, and furnished what I have called a specifically masculine development of the feminist ideal, though its success lay in the readiness with which it was accepted and believed in by women as a justification of this masculine failure to assume the responsibility of parenthood.

The book with which this new ideal is associated is Edward Carpenter's "Love's Coming-of-Age." But it would be unjust to say that it preached any such notions as the one with

which we have to deal. What it did, by its so sympathetic, so delicate, and so profound discussion of the subject of sex, was to reassure us upon the point of our emotional conflict between the desires born of impulse and the fears based on economic conditions. We were made to feel that the traditional norm of conduct in the relations of the sexes was not as fixed a thing as our limited experience had led us to imagine; that the familiar institutionalization of this relationship in family life was too narrow a form to include all the possibilities which that relationship had to offer; that in times of economic change such institutions became particularly inadequate to the full expression of the love-life of mankind; and that in these very periods of economic stress, and in the variations from traditional conduct which they promote, are created the new and finer forms of association—Love's true coming-of-age!

Was it indeed possible, that in us, in our inability and unwillingness to assume traditional responsibilities, there was the condition out of which a finer type of love-relationship should

evolve? We did not ask this question; but we answered it. . . . We had cultivated of necessity, but to a perfection of its own, the kind of companionship between the sexes which is based on economic independence. We had, perforce—but with an ardor which we alone could give—realized the possibilities of a kind of love that brooks no interference with personal ambition, which leaves the lover and the beloved free to pursue each their own purposes, which brings personalities together in a delicate tangential intimacy that does not impair their individual and sacred freedom.

We had in fact played together so long that it was easy to conceive a life of playing together as the new and finer type of emotional relationship, the Love of the Future. We had had to avoid responsibility so long that we made freedom from responsibility our ideal. These young women wanted our companionship; well, it was to be had, fully and freely, upon these ideal terms. If they were of the Past, they might go marry their old business men; if they were of the Future, they might

live the free untrammeled love-life of that future here and now.

There was in this no necessary defiance of the institution of marriage, in the sense of refusing to go before a clergyman or registrar for a "ceremony." That was a concession to custom which might well be endured for the sake of its resulting conveniences, if such were apparent. Nor was there any formal abrogation of the function of parenthood; in fact, it was quite the other way—there was a definite assumption of the right of a woman to have a child whenever she wanted to. It was an adventure which no one had the right to deny her! But it was her own adventure. The theory, indeed, made no mention of the masculine evasion, it appeared simply as a feminine heroism. The Free Woman would choose her own life: she would not be made by custom or a man's wish, but only by her own free will, the mother of a child. When the adventures of work and play should pall, there would be time to consider that further extension of her activities. But when the time came, it was to

be her own affair; she would ask no man to support her child. Did not women by the thousands, deprived of economic support by the vicissitudes of life and death, support their own children? She had her career, which child-bearing should no more than temporarily interrupt; were there not hundreds of examples of women who found the bringing up of children compatible, and happily compatible, with a career? It was simply a question of whether being women meant an inevitable limitation of their human activities. If they were not regular human beings, but only sexual beings, let the fact be humbly accepted, and the harem taken as their proper sphere. But if they could be human beings and mothers as well, let them take up the double burden without complaint.

It makes no difference to the consideration of the literary influences and idealistic attitudes here under discussion, how many young women succeeded in carrying out this difficult but not impossible plan; how many of them found themselves obliged to call upon their husbands or families for the despised traditional subsidy of motherhood; nor how many of them let it

remain a heroic theory, and accepted childlessness as the not necessarily tragic price of companionship with the lover of their choice. The only point which concerns us here is the trend of idealism under certain influences, in the direction of a novel non-participation, by young male idealists, in the responsibilities of family life. This is a step further than the renunciation of responsibility toward society-in-general.

But if it successfully eliminated babies, as too troublesome a part of the world of reality for harassed idealism to deal with, it still included real women and the serious and very real relation of love. These also were to be largely eliminated from consideration by the further developments of masculine idealism, in a small but significant sphere of social life.

It will be by this time apparent that the literature upon which we grew up had thus far failed in the task of enabling us to face realistically the world in which we lived. It failed, because its efforts to interpret that world to us, to give us such conceptions of it and of our relation to it as would make life worth living, had not borne the test of experience.

It succeeded only in its other function, that of enabling us to blink the full import of realities, to accept without shame the indignities of life, and to evade with undiminished self-respect our responsibilities toward a world in which such indignities were inflicted.

There is no reason to quarrel with the necessitous compromises which we have been considering in the realm of sexual relationships; and there is every reason to admire the courage with which so many young women undertook their heavier burden in that compromise. What we have to criticize is the meekness with which we young male idealists accepted a humiliating situation simply because it was an economic fact; and the failure of imaginative literature to make us face its humiliatingness. Capitalism had deprived us of the opportunity for responsible fatherhood, and had compelled upon the young women who preferred our society an indecent choice between childlessness and something too much resembling martyrdom. And we were not angry at capitalism. We did not seriously consider the possibility of changing that state of affairs. We did not

entertain the notion of balancing the heroism or the sacrifice of our sweethearts by some heroism or some sacrifice of our own in the way of an effort to reshape this sorry scheme of things entire. There were no works of imaginative literature to make us feel that we should. But there were an increasing number of imaginative writings which served to help reconcile us to our situation, which deepened our cynicism with regard to violent social change, which enabled us to think very well of ourselves, and even to regard our laissez-faire, do-nothing selfishness as a pattern of social heroism.

## Chapter VI

## *We Become Joyous Vagabonds*

"FOR TO ADMIRE AND FOR TO SEE"—THE JOYS OF THE ROAD—PLAYING AT LIFE—"I HAVE BEEN FAITHFUL TO THEE, CYNARA, IN MY FASHION"

THE literature of the early twentieth century, so far as it influenced us, did so chiefly by an unconsciously adroit emphasis upon the incidental beauty of the essentially homeless and childless and migratory life to which capitalism had largely condemned us.

It would doubtless be a surprise to that protagonist of old-fashioned virtues, Rudyard Kipling, to learn that he was one of the chief spiritual begetters of this kind of romanticism. But such is the case.

The Kipling who came along beating his drum and calling us to the wars, had but the

slightest influence upon our young American idealism; such influence as he had in that direction had been expended and dissipated in the brief delirium of our Cuban rescue expedition. That was about the size and strength of our benevolently-imperial impulses; and when we found that we had the Philippines on our hands, we of the younger generation were not particularly gratified. We did not feel like taking up the White Man's Burden. We understood well enough the practical commercial aspect of colonial enterprise, but we were too near the pioneer stage, we had too many undeveloped possibilities of exploitation here at home, to be particularly ambitious in that direction. Our imperialist and expansionist tendencies, which had won us Texas by force of arms, had been scotched by the Civil War. Slavery had wanted more territory; capitalism had all it needed for the present. Even the remnant of Mexico, that splendid prize which lay at our doors, must wait until there was some pressing practical reason—say oil—for its conquest. While as for Kipling's belligerent loyalty, it was a reflex of a political state of

affairs which we could not appreciate. We were no far-flung empire, anxiously foreseeing and preparing for the day of a death-grapple with our enemies. We had nothing in particular to lose, nobody in particular to fear. We did not want to brace ourselves to a Spartan discipline in the service of the Mother. We did not have to. Uncle Sam was keeping safely out of trouble, by the familiar and traditional expedient of attending to his own business. There was no emotionally warm complex of patriotic ideas to appeal to in us, since at the very core of our national pride was the Washingtonian doctrine of keeping ourselves to ourselves; at the utmost, it was the defiant "Hands off!" of Monroe. But we did not believe that it was our sacred mission to go out and civilize the rest of the world. We were not, in short, Britishers.

So it was that the appeal to "wait in heavy harness on fluttered folk and wild" met no great response among us. We didn't want to wait in heavy harness on anybody. We were harnessed enough right here at home. But we did want to go and take a look at the flut-

tered folk and wild. We were wishful of being a little more fluttered and wild ourselves, than our civilization gave us a chance to be. When Stevenson had discovered the South Seas, we were delighted with an extension of our imaginative geography which made it no longer necessary for us to seek relief from the present in the medieval past in poetry and in "historical novels." Here was a Past right here in the present, which we could go to look at as we went to a Wild West Show. It revived our childish enthusiasm—put away before we had got tired of it—for cowboys and Indians. And when Kipling brought us his magnificent pageant of Oriental and African barbarism and savagery we were enchanted. We sailed the earth joyously with him, but it was not as Servants of the Queen or as servants of anybody or anything save our own pleasure. Our restlessness, the symptom of a discontent which dares not dream of revolution, had solaced itself in side shows, in tours—the peaks and chasms which Byronism needs to comfort its despair having been set apart for our benefit, by a thoughtful government, as National

Parks. But here was the Grandest Tour of all, around the globe with Kipling—"for to admire and for to see, for to be'old the world so wide!" It turned the earth into a magnificent playground. In the waste places, among strange childlike peoples, and on the sea, we could forget capitalism and what it was doing to us. So heigh-ho, and all aboard!

*"O the blazing tropic night, when the wake's*
*a welt of light*
*That holds the hot sky tame,*
*And the steady forefoot snores through the*
*planet-powdered floors*
*Where the scared whale flukes in flame!"*—

there, indubitably, was where we homeless children, emotionally nationless and futureless ones preferred to be. It was the great compensation for our poverty. We had lost the whole world, and gained it back in a dream of world-wide adventurous wandering.

*"Her plates are scarred by the sun, dear lass,*
*And her ropes are taut with the dew,*

*For we're booming down on the old trail, our own trail, the out trail,*
*We're sagging south on the Long Trail—the trail that is always new!"*

The cult of vagabondage had begun. In the series of boyish lyrics in which it flowered, the "Songs from Vagabondia" and its successors, by Bliss Carman and Richard Hovey, the zest for being somewhere else—the "wanderlust," as it began to be called—was divorced utterly from any form of political idealism, and reunited with the romantic tradition of homeless but happy poets and artists.

These books of song, with their hearty gusto for accidental and irrelevant experience, touched all youth to the quick. Their influence was immediate and profound. They were a gathering up of the last shreds of belief, no matter how contradictory and incongruous, by which the world could be made to seem for the moment a pretty fine place to live in. Deeper than these ideas, of course, and giving them a freshness that still endures, is the natural delight of youth in being alive. But this

delight, as expressed, was a jocund mélange of Rousseauan Nature-worship in its wildest and most anarchic form, and an ultra-Wildean assertion of the superiority of the artistic to the ordinary kind of life. "Make me over, Mother April"—and in the next breath, "We are ourselves!" Your true Bohemian was the Last of the Mohicans and the First of the Greenwich Villagers. He was also Omar and Walt Whitman in one.

But both Omar and Walt have undergone a transformation before they emerge in this jejune form. The Persian philosopher has become young again, and does not spend quite all his time in the tavern; when he does go there, it is for Whitmanesque camaraderie rather than for the drink that brings forgetfulness of care. He is not afflicted by care, partly because he is robust, and partly because he is simply young and reckless. He practices what the older Omar only preached—he ignores the quarreling of the sects. He does not think about the problems of life and death; in fact, he does not think about anything that might

hurt. It is a Rubáiyát without the salty flavor of tears in it. And it is a Song of the Open Road, but of an open road that leads nowhither in particular. The "manly love of comrades" is no longer an emotion conceived as sufficient to weld these states together into a greater and more glorious Republic. It is the casual and easy affection of wandering poets and artists who happen to frequent the same bar, or who are thrown together for the season in some interesting little seaboard town as yet unspoiled by bourgeois tourists.

*"For it's always fair weather*
*When good fellows get together,*
*With a stein on the table,*
*And a good song ringing clear!"*

To-morrow, perhaps, they will drift apart, but there will be other good fellows to drink and talk with; it is not the specific personal relationship, but the facile capacity for such relationships, that counts: the "comrade heart" it is, and not the hearty comradeship, that shall

endure—and shall, incidentally, "outlast art." For the younger generation of idealists has passed beyond the stage in which it asks the public to forgive its conduct because it is incidental to the production of high art; it is almost in the position of asking the public to forgive its art because it is incidental to the production of high jinks. At any rate, it brooks no criticism of its conduct from the bourgeoisie.

*"What's that you say?*
*You highly respectable*
*Buyers and sellers!*
*We should be decenter?*
*Not, as we please, inter*
*Custom, frugality,*
*Use and morality*
*In the delectable*
*Depths of wine cellars?*

*"Midnights of revel*
*And noon days of song:*
*Is it so wrong?*
*Go to the devil!*

*"I tell you that we—*
*While you are smirking*
*And lying, and shirking*
*Life's duty of duties"—*

And what may that be, from the point of view of Vagabondia? Not, by any chance, the creation of a world in which lovers of beauty will have a respected and useful place? What is life's duty-of-duties?

*"Honest sincerity—"*

To wit, one of the two things which a vagabond idealist, however robbed of his social patrimony, however disgraced and outcast, can still do—tell the truth. But the truth about what? About the theft? Not he! He doesn't even know that he has been robbed. . . . Proceed.

*"We are in verity*
*Free."*

Free—to what, precisely?

*"Free to rejoice*
*In blisses and beauties,*
*Free as the voice*
*Of the wind as it passes,*
*Free as the bird*
*In the weft of the grasses,*
*Free as the word*
*Of the sun to the sea!*
*Free!"*

Exactly. The other thing which capitalism cannot take away from its vagabond idealists is the love of beauty. Their stake in the world has shrunk to that.

*"But what care we? Linger*
*A moment to kiss—*
*No time's amiss*
*To a vagabond's ardor—*
*Then finish the larder*
*And pull down the curtain.*

*"Unless, ere the kiss come,*
*Black Richard or Bliss come,*
*Or Tom with a flagon,*

*Or Karl with a jag on—*
*Then up and after*
*The joy of the night. . . .*"

Et cetera. But before we put the volume back upon the shelf of the college fraternity house from which we have so unkindly removed it for inspection, let us note that it furnishes an innocent transition to the stage of masculine idealism in which woman, and the love of woman, as serious realities, are eliminated from the scheme of living.

We have seen in these songs a blithe insurgence of the Play spirit, which is one of the finest elements of young idealism. But we have seen here also a blithe confession of the restricted sphere of life in which this play spirit cares—or dares—to manifest itself. There is no desire to play with machinery; to be sure, it is forbidden to youth to approach machinery except on terms of slavery—but there is here no protest against those terms, no curiosity even, as to the nature of the forbidden toy. There is no desire to engage in what might be the great game of politics, nor

any protest against the depressing rules with which that game has been spoiled for free men. These things loom large and dangerous; and they are let alone. The trouble is not that these idealists are children, but that they are unenterprising children. They are content with little toys.

Their play is not the beginning, but the renunciation of endeavor. It is a prolonged holiday away from life. Its essence is a breezy and hearty triviality. And just as their work has become a playful thing in this sense, so has their love. Both have been cut off from tragic issues. One takes what one can. And what one takes, in the way of woman's love, is already being called something else. It is being called comradeship. It is being put with the casual and hearty relationships which subsist between man and man. And it is put there because it is beginning to belong there. It is becoming—not in fanatic exemplification of some beautiful and terrible ideal of freedom, but in mere unprotested adaptation to the exigencies of migratory existence—the freely affectionate relationship of those who happen

to be thrown together for the time being: a relation of erotic good fellowship.

To-morrow, perhaps, they will drift apart. But there will be always good fellows to drink with and talk with and linger a moment to kiss:

*"For it's always fair weather*
*When good fellows get together."*

But this last development of the theory of the relationship of man and woman was not sung by the joyous poets of Vagabondia. It was sung, a little later, with a sad satire, by an English and real vagabond:

*"I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion."*

## Chapter VII

# *We Acquire the Detached Attitude*

MERELY ONLOOKERS—LIFE AS A TRAGIC CIRCUS —THE INDIFFERENCE OF THE ARTIST— NOCTURNES AND ARRANGEMENTS—LIFE AS MEANINGLESS ACCIDENT—GEORGE MOORE AND THE PYRAMIDS—FLOWERS OF SICKNESS

IN the serious realistic fiction of the late nineteenth century, we found ample reassurance for a sublime indifference toward life. More now than ever were the writers, and artists in general, divorced from serious participation in the affairs of the world. Busy though they might be at easel or desk, however preoccupied they were with the sacred mysteries of technique, they were as regards the general life of mankind idlers and onlookers. And it was from them that we learned what might be termed the super-vagabond point of view.

From this point of view the world is simply

a spectacle—something to look at. People who are busy, of course, in any ordinary sense, cannot regard the world as a spectacle. They have to regard it as an opportunity for the fulfillment of their wishes. They are too concerned with what they want to do, to stop to consider how foolish they may look trying to do it. Thus the ants, a proverbially busy tribe, have probably not the least idea how queer their endeavors appear to a disinterested eye. But to any one who does not share the passions of anthood, the spectacle of ant life is at once amusing and tragic. And when we had learned to set ourselves apart from the passions of contemporary humanity, the spectacle of its life was no less amusing and tragic. That was, in fact, just what contemporary life seemed to our disinterested view—a foolish and sad scurrying about of ants.

We did not think of this, however, as a super-vagabondish point of view. And as a matter of fact it is a point of view found not alone among other super-vagabonds. It is also to be found in any aristocracy, among that minority, that super-aristocracy whose members

have had the opportunity to get what they wanted, and have found out that it did not satisfy them after all. The best minds in an aristocracy, as we observed, tend to cease from participation in the human struggle; tend merely to look on, with cynicism or with pity, as the case might be. To them—as to the vagabond Elizabethan dramatists who found it easy enough to look at life from the point of view of their aristocratic patrons—all the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players.

This super-aristocratic, spectacular and tragic point of view we found traditionally exemplified for us in the attitude of some of the Greek poets. Not in all of them, by any means; Pindar, for instance, we discovered to be as seriously interested in sports as the sales manager of a business firm to-day in his fall campaign. The winning of a race was as important to him, as serious and significant a matter, as the taking away of a rival's best customer is to-day. But there were other poets in Ancient Greece who did not take even the Pan-Athenaic Games seriously, and who would

naturally not condescend to a naïve interest in the less important concerns of life. Chief of these was Sophocles, who wrote in what his contemporaries considered the Grand Style—not so stilted and outlandish as that of Æschylus, but high aloof from the warm homeliness of the language of Euripides; and whose attitude was one with his style. To Sophocles life was essentially a tragic spectacle; and if to Sophocles, why not then to us? We read the beginning of his most famous chorus (omitting a difficult mathematical metaphor): "O ye deathward-going tribes of men, what do your lives mean save that ye go toward death?"

Those tribes, in Greece as in our own contemporary world, had not stopped to think of that. It took disinterested observers like Sophocles and ourselves to note that while they thought they were going to the races, or to the forum, or home to dinner, they were really going just so much nearer toward death. That being the truth, then art consisted in the exemplification of the inevitable course of that spectacular progression.

It was a literary circumstance of no mean

importance, apparently, that the super-aristocrats and super-vagabonds of later times, who between them have produced most of our literature, were able to reënforce their habit of seeing life as a spectacle by the sacred and unquestioned tradition of Greek drama. This high precedent, to be sure, had not made the busy and aspiring lower classes enjoy tragedy any the better. They had instinctively preferred romance and comedy. They wanted encouragement in their hopes and forgetfulness of their troubles.

It was not strange that when, toward the latter part of the nineteenth century, fiction began to break loose from its middle-class trammels, and determined bravely to represent life not as the middle classes wished to believe it to be, but as it was—it was not strange that the new literary effort should have modeled itself more or less consciously on the Sophoclean tradition.

The Sophoclean tradition, it is true, had in the meantime become somewhat modernized and Darwinized by the professors. To bring Sophocles into line with our scientific notions,

his world ruled over by Fate was interpreted in terms of the "struggle for existence." He was supposed to have intended in his plays to exhibit some "fatal flaw" or other by reason of which his characters were doomed to overwhelming ruin. It was simply the inability of the Unfit to survive. And the Unfit, as we came more and more to see, were unfit by reason of their good qualities.

Even in the case of the unfortunate Emma Bovary (whose history became the model of all our efforts), it was her virtues that doomed her. Thackeray had sought to show that Becky Sharp came to grief because she was a bad woman. It was to us the measure of the difference between the sentimentality of the Victorian period and the candor of our own, that we could see Emma's ruin in the fact that she was not sufficiently bad—not selfish, callous nor unscrupulous enough.

And in truth the reason why we were so interested in these tragic failures of fiction was that they were symbols of ourselves. We pitied ourselves, because our love of beauty put us at a disadvantage in this hard world;

it was the unscrupulous and hard who succeeded, while we slaved in our garrets. And the value of this neo-Greek tradition, with its emphasis upon the inevitable doom which awaits all loveliness, was that it served to lift from our minds the burden of an unmanly self-pity. If we conceived of ourselves as flowers crushed under the brutal hoof of commercialism, it helped us to reflect that hoofs are stronger than flowers. We even forced ourselves to admire the tremendous rhythm of the gesture by which the stronger crushed the weaker to death. And if we disdained to pity ourselves, we were certainly not going to pity anybody else. Life, we felt, consisted so largely of spilt milk that there was no use crying over it—we might just as well celebrate the magnificent inevitability of the spilling. And if the hard indifference which we achieved was actually neither Greek nor scientific, it was at least the best we outcast vagabonds could do to maintain our dignity under the circumstances.

But it was less from fiction than from the art of painting that we acquired the finer points

of our late nineteenth-century attitude toward life. Fiction itself was discovering from the painters what it itself ought to be. It was felt that writers had ceased to be artists, in a sense in which painters had remained artists. We had much to learn from our more uncompromising brothers of the brush, and we went humbly to school, first to Whistler, and then to Manet.

It was undoubtedly true that the painters, or some of them at least, had retained more of the play spirit, and more freedom from the demands of bourgeois society and of the machine-age in general. They had brilliantly, and often heroically, refused to be in the slightest degree *useful* to a civilization which they hated. And as literature became more consciously the expression of an artistic attitude toward life, it was inevitable that it should seek inspiration in the formulas of the newer schools of painting.

In our day the Whistler influence was still powerful in literature. We remembered with indignation the libelous statement by Ruskin that Whistler's art consisted in "flinging a

pot of paint in the public's face." And yet, from our own point of view, Ruskin had stated in those words, vividly if not quite accurately, the essential characteristic of the Whistler attitude. If he had described these works as several tubes of paint more or less effectively distributed upon pieces of canvas, Whistler might, instead of suing him for damages, have said: "Ah! At last I am understood!" For that was precisely what Whistler himself had been saying all along when he called his paintings "Arrangements" in various colors.

Painting, under the Whistlerian influence, had repudiated the obligation of being anything except beautiful. But, at the same time, in the endeavor to be beautiful, it had had to repudiate the infinite variety of color and form in the day-lit world, and confine itself to those moments when color and form are least harsh and uncompromising. The skyline of a factory-town, for instance, is most beautiful, to those to whom capitalism is most unintelligible and most hateful, when it least looks like what it is—for instance, at twilight, when it has ceased to be a chaos of smokestacks and be-

comes a suggestive fantasia in black and gray.*

This, at least, was what the young literary world meant by its sudden enthusiasm for the new art. The new art was a convenient way of dealing with our ugly machine-made world, and poetry began to abound in twilit moods, in Nocturnes and Arrangements—in select parts of the dictionary effectively disposed upon the page. Poetry, too, repudiated the obligation of being anything but beautiful, and in doing so had ceased to deal with the more harsh and uncompromising facts of life.

But this twilit world was, after all, part of the every-day world—a small part of a large world that belonged to everybody. The painters desired a larger world—but a world all their own. And they discovered it by simply opening their eyes.

They discovered that if they painted what they merely *saw*, they were painting something

* "And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens—then . . . Nature, who, for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone . . ."—*Mr. Whistler's "Ten O'Clock."*

quite different from what everybody *knew* was there. Everybody knew that grass is green, and a woman's face pink and white; but the artist saw green shadows on her cheek, and red and yellow flakes of sunlight in the grass. He had only to forget all he knew, and trust to his eyes and his paint brush. . . .

Implicit in this theory of art is, of course, the doctrine that the world *as lived in* is meaningless. It is only as its shapes and colors are arranged on canvas, that it has significance. Beauty is not to be sought in the ordinary human meaning of a scene; it is in the effects of color and line purely and simply.

It was thus no longer permissible for the artist to indulge himself quietly in the creation of such effects, for his own satisfaction and that of his fellow-artists, while ostensibly he presents to the multitude a Madonna to arouse their pity or a village beauty to tease their romantic sensibilities; no, the multitude is given "A Woman Washing Her Feet," and they are defied to get any ordinary non-esthetic emotion out of the spectacle. Or it may be an Old Beggar, but the public is formally warned

that he is not there to please any one's sense of the picturesque, and still less to arouse anybody's pity. The Old Beggar is not to be considered as a human being, but only as a painting. These painters said to the public in effect: Your world means nothing to me; I do not love it, nor hate it, nor wish to alter it: and my world will mean nothing to you if you come to it with emotions of love or hate or hope.

When George Moore came home from France, he brought with him the news of this newest art; and he, among others, commenced to illustrate its principles in literature.

His "Esther Waters" was done under the influence of this theory of art. He was surprised and annoyed—as he confessed in the preface to a revised edition of the novel—that some readers had regarded it as a moral tract against betting on the races. He had not, he protested, intended to reform anybody. He did not, in fact, regard betting from a moral point of view at all. He regarded it from an artistic point of view.

If its consequences were disastrous, that interested him—"amused" him, in the studio

sense of the word. In the same way, Esther and her illegitimate child interested him. She "composed" well. And if one pitied her, it was less because of her specific misfortunes than because she was a human being; life in general was, when you came to look at it, a rather pitiful thing. Mr. Moore did not mean that we should pass bills in parliament to relieve such cases. No; he meant to say, "Life is like that." And if you asked, "Do you mean that life is ugly?"—the reply would be: "Yes, beautifully so!"

We were glad to share Mr. Moore's detached attitude toward human misery. But it was not at all because we were incapable of pity. We could sympathize easily enough; but it hurt too much. To sympathize is to "suffer with." We had to find some way to escape the burden of that suffering. We cherished the airy passage in Mr. Moore's jejune "Confessions of a Young Man," in which he says that it was well worth while for the slaves of Pharaoh to sweat and die under the lash in order that he, young Mr. Moore, might have the pleasure of looking at the pyramids. We

tried to feel the same way about it. We did not realize that in so doing we were only making a graceless mockery of our pain. We did not really like the idea of those slaves dying under the lash; and we had been able to justify the ways of Fate to man only by an exaggerated admiration of what, if it had been erected by union labor as a memorial to Mr. Gladstone, we would have perceived to be an uninteresting and inartistic piece of funerary architecture.

But our artistic emotions were all we had as a protection against our human emotions, and they had to serve. Mr. Moore, as he tells us, had been moved to write "Esther Waters" by seeing the slavey in the house where he lodged in London. He had wondered what could justify her squalid existence. And he had had to try to justify it in some way—by turning the ugliness of her real life into the tragic beauty of "Esther Waters." When we, his young disciples, wrote beautifully of horrible things, to the consternation of our elders, we were moved by the same impulse. Curious as it may seem, we were trying to justify the ways of God to man. "It is worth while for

them to suffer, in order that I may write a beautiful story" may be construed: "If I write a beautiful story about them, perhaps that will justify their sufferings."

There is implicit here a quasi-mystical identification of artist with subject. I imagine myself to be a poor wretch dying in a slum, and I suffer his pain; I then glorify that pain by the words in which I describe it; and it has been well worth while for me to suffer, in order that I might write. My suffering is transformed into creative joy. The suffering wretch of my imagination is recompensed in full by the pleasures of authorship. But the real man in the slum, with whom I have for a moment identified myself, remains unaffected by my spiritual drama. And hence, because it would hurt too much, because it would be too humiliating to wish to help him and to feel my inability to do so, I—under the tutelage of Mr. Moore—confine my feelings so far as possible to those which I as an artist may feel for the slum-dweller as artistic material. And the result, of course, of my declining to see in him any other significance than what he may

have as artistic material, is that I am compelled to refuse to recognize as significant any existence which I myself may have other than as an artist. Except with reference to art, neither he nor I truly exist.

That is what this theory of art comes to—that the actual world is phantasmagoria, and art alone is significant. Reality is illusion, and art the only true reality.

We artists had at last discovered how to face life, and yet evade its human responsibilities. . . .

We cling—it seemed to us—to our little rafts on a dark storm-tossed sea. And we are fortunate in having even so poor and perilous a refuge, for all about us we hear the cries of the drowning. We cannot save them all. At our heroic best, we could help only one or two—and the tragedy of life would still go on. The truth is too pitiful to face. And if we took the ordinary human view of the situation, we would go mad. For we are not, like others, of that callous crowd who can be happy in finding themselves safe, who even rejoice in being able to clamber on some larger raft

and shove its occupants off into the darkness. No, because we are artists, and sensitive, we can hear their cries, and feel their anguish, all too well. But we cannot help them. And so we take a detached, artistic, Sophoclean view of the situation. . . .

That girl there—poor, frail thing—we watch her struggles. She is losing hold, and we can foresee the inevitable moment when her hands, blue with cold, will loosen their grasp. For life is like that. Soon or late the hand of fate—yes, she is gone—up-bubbles all her amorous breath, as Keats said. A good phrase! And what better can one do than make phrases—or remember them? . . . Yes. See how the Moon, who is caprice itself, touches with serene and lovely fingertips the white upturned face—what was it Baudelaire said? . . .

And why not? If we are truly so helpless, then Art is as good a consolatory religion as any other.

## Chapter VIII

# *We (almost) Die for Art*

GOETHE, REVISED—ENAMELS AND CAMEOS—MARTYRS OF ART—THE STORY OF PARK BARNITZ—THE LAST WORDS OF DUDEBAT

GOETHE was one of our heroes. Not because we actually admired anything he ever wrote, but because of his celebrated "Olympian calm" in the face of tragic national misadventures. Not because of his alleged universality of interests, but on the contrary, because of his supposed lack of any interest whatever in the things that everybody else was interested in. It was with intense scorn that we read the ridiculous fulminations of the social-patriot Börne against him.—"What! Goethe, a highly gifted man, a poet, in the best years of his manhood . . . to be in the council of war, in the camp of the Titans, on the very spot where, forty years before, the

audacious yet sublime wars of kings against their peoples began, and to find no inspiration in these surroundings, to be moved to neither love nor hatred, neither prayer nor curse, to nothing but a few epigrams! . . . And I am to honor that man! to love that man!"

We honored and loved him for precisely that. In the same manner we came to honor and love Henry James, irrespective of our ability to make head or tail of his sentences, simply because those sentences notoriously and haughtily ignored the demands of the ordinary reader for an ordinary meaning.*

This admiration of ours for purely negative qualities in our literary divinities has a history of its own. In the eighteenth century, litera-

* Compare Börne's denunciation of Goethe's indifference to history with this passage in which Rebecca West discusses the indifference of Henry James, apropos of his French travel book. "He did not know whether the Franco-Prussian war was horrible or not, because he had been out of Europe when it raged; and because he had not been born at the time, he could no more speak well of the French Revolution than he could propose for his club a man whom he had never met. And for the same reason he failed to envisage the Roman Empire save as a source of agreeable ruins which, since he did not understand the spirit that built them, he imagined might have been made still more agreeable."

ture had had a tendency to usurp the pontifical powers which for some centuries had been held by the head of the church. Voltaire had established himself as a kind of anti-Pope, and as such handed down pronouncements, approval and disapproval of a final and shattering nature, which were accepted by his followers as devoutly as their fathers had accepted those of his traditional antagonist. It was believed that the church was about to be destroyed forever; and it was natural enough for the intelligentsia to assume that their own chief representatives, the great littérateurs, would succeed to the spiritual primacy of mankind. These hopes the French Revolution destroyed—everywhere except in France, where for many years words were regarded as having the same authenticity as deeds: Voltaire and Rousseau were supposed to have actually brought about the Revolution; and other writers aspired to become, similarly, makers of history. This tradition accounts for the challenge sent by Victor Hugo to the King of Prussia, offering to decide the issue of the war by personal combat. Victor Hugo could, without

causing his fellow-citizens to die of laughter, assume that he was as truly the representative of the French people as the King was of the Prussians. The tradition has lingered amusingly to the present day in the naming of French battleships after great French writers. *Voltaire* is felt to be an appropriate name for a French warship.

But outside France the eighteenth-century Utopian respect for writers with ideas was turned into fear; and literary men who had any claim to being artists felt constrained to renounce actual intellectual leadership of the populace. They did not on that account renounce their pontifical airs; they only transferred the emphasis of greatness from participation to non-participation in the immediate interests of their fellow-men.

Goethe was the first outstanding literary figure to fall heir to this transvaluation of values. He was praised as much for not being interested in what happened to Germany as Voltaire had been for attempting to instruct a Prussian king in the art of government. It was felt to be a melodramatic action, really out

of keeping with a poetic career, when Byron died in the struggle for Greek freedom. Goethe, serenely composing epigrams in oblivious indifference to the fortunes of aspiring nationality, was a much more agreeable figure to the nineteenth-century artistic imagination. It was considered fitting for the poet not to be too much excited about ordinary human concerns; that was to be great, to be wise, to be magnificently heathen and Greek. Goethe himself had made up for his lack of certain ordinary interests by other quite extraordinary interests—such as his interest in comparative anatomy, which particularly enraged his critic Börne. But even comparative anatomy was too human for the later period; it smacked somehow of bourgeois usefulness. We preferred something much more defiantly and flagrantly useless, such as the polishing of a rhyme. Goethe may not have agreed with us that the perfecting of a couplet was more important than the destinies of one's native land; but that was only because in the lapse of years we had become more Olympian than Goethe.

The Goethe legend was accordingly revised

to fit the later nineteenth-century mood by Gautier, and the sacredness of mere artistic preoccupation as such proclaimed to the world in "Émaux et Camées." All passes; art alone endures. But, to endure, it must be thoroughly "done."

> *"Carve! paint! chisel!*
> *That thy fluctuant dream*
> *Be sealed*
> *In the resisting block."*

Here is the new morality. The man who would disdain to preach in verse upon any other subject does not hesitate to sermonize upon the sinfulness of careless execution, and the virtue of precise execution, in the realm of artistic endeavor. . . . It is a morality which has only to be carried out logically to abrogate all other codes. It is then of no consequence whether the old commandments are kept or broken; this new commandment is all that matters.

The bourgeoisie, it is true, in shocked envy impute more devilishness to the artist than he could ever achieve. Nevertheless, though the

facts are sufficiently different from the popular legends, it was not the bourgeoisie who invented the legends—they lack the imagination. It was the artist who invented the legend, and it represents at least a pathetic ideal. Often enough he has been good and kind, temperate in his habits, and regular to his meals; and all the more he has wished that he, like the hero of "The Moon and Sixpence," could throw a woman downstairs without the quiver of an eyelash. His artist's morality may have remained a mere pious aspiration; he may never have been able to be truly hellish—but then the less artist, he!

Consider: it is a stringent code which one must, under this dispensation, live up to. It is hard not to take thought for the morrow, it is sometimes very hard to evade all responsibilities, it is especially hard for some, weaker brethren that they are, to remember that women have no honorable place in an artist's life. It is hard to keep from being human. Generally it was found to be possible to maintain this high level of artistic virtues only through a short period of one's youth; after

a while one gave up the struggle, accepted a destiny of bourgeois usefulness and comfort, and lost one's artist's soul. . . .

And even in that brief period, it was necessary to fortify oneself, in many cases, with drink and drugs, against the temptations of the world. The life of dreams was barricaded most securely, it seemed, with alcohol or morphia, and then one's garret was indeed paradise. Thus cut off from the world of reality by a magic circle, one looked outside into the chaos of meaningless accident with a kind of divine scorn. Even women, viewed from within this magic circle, were perceived to have for the artist no more than a transitory and ephemeral significance. . . .

England and France have their myths of artist-martyrdom. America has none of first-rate quality. And yet what might we not have made of the story of Park Barnitz! I give the bare facts of his life, as I find them recorded (by my friend, Edna Kenton) upon the flyleaf of her copy of his sole, and anonymous, volume, "The Book of Jade" (Doxey's, 1901):

"Born 1877; died 1902. Son of Dutch Re-

formed clergyman, of Kansas. Went to various schools in the state, and, after several expulsions, went to Boulder, Colo., and at the university there found for the first time great stimulation. Later he attended Harvard Graduate School. Had a remarkable knowledge of the art history of the world, and of musical history, and of all literatures. Snapped up all the languages, and knew much of the philosophies. Was a favorite pupil of Barrett Wendell and of William James. Was at Harvard in 1898-99. Returned then to Kansas.

"Was addicted to all drugs, and had a background of extraordinary experiences. Held the curious pose of an aristocratic man of the world, combined with all his bizarre and decadent predilections and desires.

"Was six feet six inches tall, and extremely thin—weighed only one hundred and fifteen pounds. Delighted to wear evening clothes and high hat without an overcoat. Died at his Kansas home, a victim to drugs and resulting ill-health. Except for the Manuscript of 'Chave,' as yet unpublished, 'The Book of Jade' is his only work."

The volume itself is dedicated "To the Memory of Charles Baudelaire." The titles of the poems are: "Ashtoreth," "Parfait Amour," "Opium," "Sombre Sonnet," "Languor," "Ennui," "Litany," "Harvard," "Pride," "Song of Golden Youth," "Mais Moi Je Vis La Vie En Rouge," "Louanges D'Elle," "Hélas," "Changelessness," "Poppy Song," "Requiem," "Sonnet of Burial," "Nocturne," "Mad Sonnet," "The House of Youth," "De Profundis," "Sonnet of the Instruments of Death," "Truth," "Monotony," "Sepulture," "Miserrimus," "Scorn," "The Grave," "Mummy," "Sepulchral Life," "Corpse," "The Grotesques," "Dead Dialogue," and so on. The last-named poem is a lengthy discussion between a number of corpses upon the meaning of life, the corpses agreeing that life's meaning is simply and solely death:

> "*Just for this end*
> *Hideously propagated evermore.*"

The verses are such a mixture of Baudelaire, Swinburne, Wilde and Gautier as the titles

would lead one to expect, with a further dash of bookish Orientalism:

*"I am a little tired of all things mortal;*
*I see through half-shut eyelids languorous*
*The old monotonous*
*Gold sun set slowly through the western portal,*
*Where I recline upon my deep divan,*
*In Ispahan.*

*"I am a little weary of the Persian*
*Girl that I lov'd; I am quite tir'd of love;*
*And I am weary of*
*The smoking censers, and the sweet diversion*
*Of stroking Leila's jasmine-scented hair,*
*I thought so fair.*

*"At last I think I am quite tired of beauty;*
*Why do the stars shine always in the sky?*
*I think if I might die,*
*Something more sweet, less tiring than the duty*
*Of kissing her, might be; I am tired of myrrh,*
*And kissing her."*

Do not laugh. We of the younger generation all felt very much that way. We were quite weary of the exotic fantasies in which we dutifully indulged. And it ill becomes us to sneer at the tawdry and banal and second-hand prettiness and pessimism of these lines. For who can doubt the sincerity of this performance? Who can question the contempt for the bourgeoisie implicit and occasionally explicit in these pages? And, above all, who can doubt the passion for perfection, the labors of the emery-wheel that were expended upon these imitation gems, which he, poor soul, naturally enough took to be genuine? Flaubert, perhaps, strove no harder for the "right word" than Park Barnitz for the phrase to describe Leila's hair. "Jasmine-scented" seemed to him, no doubt, a triumph of poetic-felicity! And with what single-minded devotion did he concentrate the learning which, as a favorite pupil of William James and Barrett Wendell, he gained at America's foremost educational institution, upon the development of his art, letting nothing stand in the way. He might have gone into the real-estate business in Kansas, and

have married and brought up a family; but he saved himself from these temptations. He preferred—as no doubt he did prefer—to die of drugs, unsullied of the world.

And that was the ideal which art offered to us in the late nineteenth century—to perfect our art, of which perfection we were to be the sole judge; and to be, outside our art, as non-existent as possible, with whatever extraneous assistance our tormented nervous systems might require. And accordingly, each after our fashion, and sticking it out as long as we could, we were the Park Barnitzes of These States—secure in the knowledge that the world was chaos, that life was not worth living, that art alone endures, and that even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea.

Bernard Shaw, somewhat later, wrote our dying speech for us. We all know it by heart, the dying utterance of Dudebat, in "The Doctor's Dilemma":

"I'm not afraid, and not ashamed. [*Reflectively, puzzling it out for himself weakly.*] I know that in an accidental sort of way, struggling through the unreal part of life, I haven't

always been able to live up to my ideal. But in my own real world I have never done anything wrong, never denied my faith, never been untrue to myself. I've been threatened and blackmailed and insulted and starved. But I've played the game. I've fought the good fight. And now it's over, there's an indescribable peace. [*He feebly folds his hands and utters his creed.*] I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt; in the might of design, the mystery of color, the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting, and the message of art that has made these hands blessed. Amen. Amen. [*He closes his eyes and lies still.*]."

That was putting the case for us much better than we could have put it for ourselves. It would have been quite worth while dying, just to have flung that last defiance in the face of a smug and hypocritic world. But before we actually got to the point—for, after all, we were young, our constitutions were strong, and some of us, who really preferred ice-cream soda to absinthe, were content to be secretly tame and conventional so long as we had a pub-

lic reputation for hieratic wickednesses—before we actually were in a position to make any sort of dying speech, something happened to make us lose our interest in death and renew our interest in life.

What happened to us was H. G. Wells. With his coming the nineteenth century was at an end and the twentieth century, a century of hope and change and adventure, had begun.

## Chapter IX

# *We Become Servants of the Future*

THE END OF THE WORLD—THE HEROES OF H. G. WELLS—BERNARD SHAW AS THE KING'S JESTER—REALITIES VS. DREAMS

TO the older generation, no doubt, the appearance of H. G. Wells upon the literary horizon was no very startling phenomenon. He was to them a curious and ingenious inventor of "scientific fantasies," a kind of successor to Jules Verne. He wrote interestingly of airplanes, and Martians, and exploring the Moon. . . . But to us, in our decaying and autumnal world, his voice was the wild west wind, from whose presence the dead leaves of old esthetic creeds and pessimistic philosophies scattered "like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing"; a wind bearing winged seeds. . . . a Shelleyan wind, prophetic of the Spring.

We had been living in a fixed world, a world which seemed in all essential respects to have existed for ever, and which would last to eternity. At least—the changes in it were so slight and circumstantial as to be meaningless; and with these changes, which were the product of ulterior forces, we had nothing to do. We were the creatures of the past, and the victims of the present. We neither hoped nor feared for the future, because we assumed that it would be of a piece with the present and the past.

And suddenly there came into our minds the magnificent and well-nigh incredible conception of Change—not petty little pseudo-Darwinian changes, trivial and orderly—but gigantic, miraculous change, an overwhelming of the old in ruin and an emergence of the new. Into our eternal and changeless world came H. G. Wells prophesying its ending, and the Kingdom of Heaven come upon earth: the heavens shall be rolled up like a scroll, and all the familiar things of earth pass away utterly—so he seemed to cry out to our astounded ears.

And with that idea of Change, we looked at

the world with new and fascinated eyes. It had become suddenly real to us, because suddenly it meant something. It was going somewhere! The present was significant because it was the link of time between the future and the past. Now, we realized, was the crux of all eternity. Upon this moment hung something of the destiny of all mankind. And upon us, inhabiting this present, depended something. The future was not going to be the same as the present. It was going to be better—or worse. And whether better or worse was a matter upon which we could have our say. We could no longer regard ourselves as the creatures of the past, the victims of the present—we were the creators of the future. And the burden of this tremendous responsibility exalted and refreshed us.

Mankind might perhaps degenerate into some baser form, and perish from the earth; or it might stand upon the earth as upon a footstool and stretch out its hands among the stars. And something of that choice lay with us. Hoping and fearing, we lived again.

It was true; the old world was dying. Year

by year it was drawing nearer to the agony of its catastrophe. We who were early readers of H. G. Wells were not among those who were surprised by the World War; we had read about it too often, and in too intimate detail, in his pages. We had faced in imagination not only its horror, but the famine, the economic ruin, and the political debacle which followed in its train. . . . It was true, too, that something new was coming to birth; and we could at least dimly glimpse that something through the smoke of ruin. . . .

The hugeness of that catastrophe, against the imagined flames of which we acted out our individual lives, did not make us small. Those flames lit our lives with their own beautiful and terrible light.

It was *our* future. We, accepting it, made it our own. Its secret was locked in our hearts, and our hands were dedicated to its service. We lived for it, and were thereby ennobled.

It may seem a little ridiculous, this dedication of our lives to the Future. It *was* a little ridiculous. But it gave us self-respect. We understood ourselves in relation to something

besides our individual ambitions and our individual miseries. We were the happier in being able, under the H. G. Wells influence, to face with dignity, and with neither fear nor cynicism, the world in which we lived. We were able to expand the narrow boundaries of pessimistic estheticism, and to find nothing that is human alien to us. We developed that divinest because least selfish of man's passions, the passion of curiosity, to a pitch that gave promise of a new intellectual renascence. . . . But we were a little silly for all that.

We need not blame H. G. Wells for the fact, but it so happened that his heroes reproduced and held up to our esteem a quality which we all possessed, a quality which was an inheritance of our nineteenth-century training, and which peculiarly unfitted them, as it unfitted us, for service on behalf of the future. They were of the breed of Ibsen's tragic characters and Bernard Shaw's comic characters—the true nineteenth-century type which includes both industrial exploiters and artists. They were individualists par excellence—queer, lonely, self-opinionated, impulsive, erratic and ego-wor-

shiping creatures, utterly undisciplined and incapable of getting along with other people except upon their own egregious terms. Regarded closely, every one of Mr. Wells' heroes is seen to be a crank, a curious and pathetic mixture of egotist and fool. If we were unable to perceive this, it was doubtless because we were so much of both ourselves. We did what we wanted to do, and thought about it afterward. And, as it happened, nothing in the world was so calculated to throw the glamour of righteousness over our impulsive follies as the notion that we were the servitors of the Future.

There is something admirable about such folly; it has a dignity of its own, and no one need ever be ashamed to have fooled himself to the top of his Futuristic bent by the brave theories in which his infantile behavior was cloaked. There is something admirable even in its cruelty—and the H. G. Wells young man of reality was often cruel precisely in his effort to be generous. He was the true Utopian, and as such he insisted on being better than this world—and those he loved must needs be bet-

ter, too. Mr. Wells in more than one novel has worked out a case against jealousy, showing how much nobler we would be without that primordial passion interfering to mess up our lives. The H. G. Wells young man in real life was virtuously abjuring that passion, and inflicting upon his sweetheart an ideal of generous love which was usually what she least of all desired. As if in unconscious recognition of the erratic and unstable material with which he had to deal, Mr. Wells worked out on paper a form of self-discipline for the self-elect rulers of the future (the "Samurai"), which in reality, among Mr. Wells' young disciples, became a means of inflicting the oddest kind of neurotic propensities upon their confiding friends and intimates. Nobody in any of Mr. Wells' novels ever achieves anything with the help of any organized body, scientific, political or economic—he does it all by himself. And we were thereby confirmed in our disposition to rebuild the world by means of that sacred bundle of egotisms and impulses which constituted our individual personalities.

The fact was, nobody in Mr. Wells' novels

could ever have actually built or rebuilt anything; and no more could we. But we, like Mr. Wells' heroes, were admirably constituted to assist rapidly in the disintegration of existing society. Querulous and ignorant, in spite of our gospel of "love and fine thinking," we represented a generation which had endured a misbuilt civilization so long that we were destructive in all our instincts. We talked of order, but it was only as a justification for throwing more monkey-wrenches into the machinery of the existing system. Our monkey-wrenches were merely verbal, it is true, but they were not without their effect. For the intelligentsia of a given age both follows and leads the rest of society. We summed up and expressed the blind rage of the worker and the artist against a hideous civilization; and we gave a new power and definition to that rage by the words in which we uttered it. We had been dispossessed, we had nothing at stake; and suddenly we realized our power, and used it. . . . When a decaying order is about to collapse, it can still be held together for a time by the magic of words; but when the users of words are seeking

to destroy rather than to conserve that order, its doom is dated. . . .

Yet if the ruin which we foretold had come suddenly, and out of its ruins there had commenced to emerge, crudely enough, a new kind of order, how would we who held these ideas have viewed that desperate attempt? With suspicion, for it would have been initiated by others than ourselves, and we would have been incapable of believing that salvation for the world could have come from other hands than our own. We would have continued to talk of "order," amidst that chaos, and from the point of view of our own ideal of perfection have sneered at the grimy labors of the real rebuilders of the world. We would have held aloof, and said, "This is not what we want."

It is a magnificent thing to be able to face the Future: but nothing in the influences which we were able to receive from the invigorating gospel of H. G. Wells was of a nature to enable us to face the Present.

Bernard Shaw seemed at first equally a friend of all our follies and an encourager of all our weaknesses. His profound vagabond

antipathy to "romance," though taking the form of an apparently paradoxical Puritanism, won our hearts at the outset. And in the whole field of the sexual relationship, throughout his literary career, Shaw did not fail to reassure us in our erotic cowardices and cruelties, heroizing us to the top of our bent in a series of delightful vagabond lovers to whom the more serious or stable aspects of that relationship meant nothing in the world.

Nevertheless it was Bernard Shaw who first made us aware of our spiritual predicament with regard to that Future which in such odd ways we sought to serve. He showed us what the Future, which we sought to serve, would think of us. He made us realize that the Future, instead of putting up statues to us, would laugh at us. He made us laugh at ourselves.

Curiously enough, the older generation did not discover—has never discovered—what Shaw was making fun of. It supposed that Shaw was attacking the conventions. But Shaw was doing nothing of the sort—he was laughing at us for attacking the conventions so feebly and foolishly. He did not make fun of

marriage. He made fun of those who thought they could easily invent something better than marriage. He did not heap his scorn upon capitalism, but rather upon those who thought they could destroy capitalism merely with fine words or fine emotions. He said: Jericho's walls are stronger than you think, and you will have to do more than march around it blowing your horn if you expect ever to take possession.

Because he spoke in our own dialect, he was regarded as a rebel; but he was rather our privileged satirist, permitted to tell us how foolish we are. In our own language he delivered to us the advice of a Methodist vestryman: High ideals are all very well, but it is necessary to learn to pay your debts; and when the real revolution comes, you will find your real leader telling you the same thing. You will have to work, and keep your account books straight, in the Future just as in the present; and if you don't do it in the Future the difference will be that instead of being admired for your "genius," you will be put in jail as a counter-revolutionary!

He seemed to say to us: Are you quite sure you want the Future, after all? You may not like it. And very possibly it may not like you! You will probably be surprised to find how sober and industrious and respectable the Future will be. Revolutions have a way of being highly moral, and real revolutionists are frequently people of impeccably virtuous life. They haven't time to be anything else. You may find the Future dull, you know!

To us, at this stage in our intellectual development, common sense had the value of an epigram. And Bernard Shaw's common sense brought us face to face with the question:

*Can you create a new civilization upon the ruins of the old? Can you even get along in such a new civilization if some one else creates it for you?*

Were we, in looking forward to a new world, indulging in the same kind of illusions as our eighteenth-century great-grandfathers? Would this new Revolution, like the last, bring realities different from our dreams? And were we, by reason of our disillusionment and chagrin, con-

demned to be unable to take part in the life of the new age, but destined rather to turn back and seek refuge in romantic dreams of the past? And, finally, how much blame for that discrepancy might we lay upon that new world-order, and how much upon ourselves?

## Chapter X

## *Intellectual Shell-Shock*

RÉSUMÈ—WAR AND PEACE—THE CLOCK TURNS BACKWARD—THE REJECTION OF "MEANINGS"—DABBLING IN CHAOS—THE 'ORRORS OF THE "UNCONSCIOUS"—THE TRAMP'S REVENGE—THE INFANTILE VIEW OF LIFE—RUSSIA—"DUTY"—THE HUNGRY SHEEP—THE LIQUIDATION OF THE "FREEDOM" MOVEMENT—A STILL YOUNGER GENERATION

IT has been suggested in these pages that the course of nineteenth-century imaginative literature was largely determined by two historical facts or considerations lying outside the boundaries of that century—that is, by the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century and an expected World War and revolution in the twentieth century: expectations of which the recent World War and the

Russian Revolution may be regarded either as a partial fulfillment or as the prelude to an actual fulfillment still to come. To resume briefly the argument: the French Revolution, disappointing the Utopian hopes of the intelligentsia of the western world, led in literature first to the Byronic mood of cynicism, and presently to a romantic revival of interest in the Middle Ages—from the last remaining vestiges of which the intelligentsia had so short a time before been so eager to escape; next, the Darwinian controversy, beginning in mid-century, was, in its popular form, an attempt to deal with the problem created by the horrors of the machine age—an attempt on the one hand to find a justification for these horrors by discovering as the very basis of biologic progress a similar merciless competition, in which the "unfit" must perish—and an attempt on the other hand to reassert the existence in the universe of a principle of goodness higher than these cruel "natural laws"; and the inability of the intelligentsia to get, from its favorite spokesmen in this great controversy, any hope of the tyranny of the machine ever coming to an end, or to

be reconciled to that tyranny as a necessary mode of progress, led finally to that withdrawal of the interest of sensitive and creative minds from the serious concerns and great problems of life, that feeble, esthetic indifferentism which marked the characteristic literary mood of the end of the century. So much for the influence of the French Revolution. But in the meantime the influences of a revolution still to come in the twentieth century were beginning to assert themselves, in the form of vague expectations of some gigantic collapse of the existing order in world war and the emergence of some new order out of the ruins. Under these influences, literature again began to deal seriously and hopefully with important human problems. . . . Some such pattern in the relations between history and imaginative literature can be discerned, if not always clearly or surely, in the outstanding data furnished by the period to our view, and this pattern was intended to be emphasized by the examples chosen in these pages for comment. It remains now to inquire what have been thus far the effects upon the intelligentsia of such fulfillments as history has

now afforded of these expectations—a sufficiently difficult task—and (a still more dubious matter) what is likely to be their effect upon a still younger generation of the intelligentsia.

*"And so, to-night, seeing the hopes that fail,*
*Seeing the brute that is a part of man,*
*I think that Galahad and his Holy Grail*
*Had best make way for some less gilded plan.*
*We, lewd and savage cousins of the ape,*
*May well cease boasting of our family tree,*
*And with a certain modesty try to shape*
*A dream more consonant with reality. . . .*
*—As a poor madman, guessing that his brain*
*Inherits some defect of fatal blood,*
*Accepts the curse of an accursed strain,*
*And halts, midway of his grandiloquent mood—*
*And for one honest hour ceases to boast*
*Himself lord of that forest where he is lost."*

So runs a passage in a recent American poem which undertakes the task of spiritual re-orientation in this post-war period. In the same

poem ("Nocturne in a Library," by Arthur Davison Ficke) we find another passage which tells the expectations with which, utterly skeptical of the promises of the League of Nations, the "Disarmament" Conference, the treaties of Locarno, etc., etc., the intelligentsia are now obliged to face the future:

"*Cruel and evil and aloof and cold*
*This dawn confronts us. For with secret breath*
*New war-lords like the ones we knew of old*
*To-day, in council, still are whispering death.*
*Again they weave their intricacies of hate*
*Which, on some other dawn, inevitably,*
*Shall be the arbiters of the young men's fate—*
*Shall be the swift tornado from the sky.*
*In every land is raised the old device*
*Of greed and terror, ignorance and hate.*
*That which we swore should never happen twice*
*Grows strong—without our gate, within our gate.*
*And high-and-low and near-and-far conspire*
*To heap the rich fuel and invoke the fire.*"

The "peace" has been indeed, even more than the war, a disillusionment. The war revealed how feeble and undependable were any of the schemes or instruments which human idealism had devised to withstand the forces which could be set in motion to inflame or to coerce populations into war. Even those who, upon both sides, "believed" in this war, could not but be appalled, when they reflected upon these matters, at the prospects thus afforded of new wars to come; while of those new wars, the peace, if it does not deliberately assure them, offers but the most mocking hopes of avoidance to minds trained in disillusion. The future can be envisaged only as a lull of temporary exhaustion and of preparation for further and more gigantic and more destructive and more futile wars to come. Humanity appears to have climbed painfully up from the primeval slime and reached out its hands toward the stars in vain. Its arts and sciences, its religion and politics, its braveries and prides, have provided it with the full means of self-destruction, and there seems to be nothing to stay its hand. There are evidently flaws in

our human nature which make our idealism a tragic joke. . . . Facing an ironic doom which it feels powerless to avert, the intelligentsia of our time has for the most part put aside with a kind of shame its broken and shattered ideals, and has confessed its hopelessness by the very nature of its new esthetic and intellectual interests. Some, indeed, refusing to face at all so black a reality, have retired into a sort of new Ivory Tower hastily jerry-built according to some fantastic futurist blue-print, and occupy themselves with such harmlessly esthetical pastimes and intellectual cross-word puzzles as will serve to pass the time. But others, perhaps more deeply hurt, have expressed their pain and disillusion in enthusiasms for such new imaginative works as reflect, indirectly but impressively, this shattering of their hopes.

Even of this more serious literature, much is marked by the superficial appearance of an idle estheticism or an intellectual guessing-game, so that it might at first glance seem nothing very new after all. Many, perhaps most, of the traits of this new literature are in fact old, and have already been discussed in

these pages. It might therefore seem to represent entirely—as it does partly—merely a return (or, in Freudian terms, a "regression") to an earlier and infantile stage of our psychic development. And indeed in these respects it does, even at its best, hark back to that so-called Yellow Book period which we fondly hoped we had left behind at the end of the last century. There is the same preoccupation with "form," even though the most approved form has now become an ostentatious formlessness. There is the already familiar tendency of vagabond literature to become an esoteric mystery for the elect. But there is here also something new, in the sense at least that a certain characteristic attitude toward life has developed to an extreme which constitutes a new trait in literature.

It may be called (accepting for purposes of description what might from an old-fashioned point of view be a phrase of final judgment) a celebration of the ugliness and chaos of life. Now life has always been considered chaotic, in the sense that it presented to us in actual experience a tangle of conflicting motives, ir-

relevant sensations, inexplicable successions of events. And it has been the accepted purpose of imaginative literature to give us clews through this labyrinth of mere experience, by arranging large masses of apparently discrepant and emotionally contradictory facts in some clear and intelligible order. That was called "showing the meaning of life." It was never supposed that one "meaning" exhausted all the interpretative possibilities of the field of human experience. It was not felt to be distressing that one writer's interpretation differed from another's. And it was understood that any interpretation could seem "true" only by selections of the facts interpreted—that is, by leaving out the facts which would not fit in the pattern. Indeed, literature came to have artificial selective customs of its own, and various facts of life which were not actually thought to be "ugly" in daily experience were regarded as too "ugly" to appear in the pages of a book. Some of these facts were such as could be taken readily for granted, while in other instances this customary censorship of "offensive" details was a serious inconvenience

to writers who regarded those details as being of some importance in the lives they were seeking to interpret. But, even when demanding the right to go outside the customary boundaries in the selection of facts to interpret, they were actually engaged in the task of interpreting life. It is precisely this task which has now been deliberately abandoned in some of the characteristic productions of this period—except in so far as an assertion that life is a mere chaos may be said to be an interpretation of it. These works are not chaotic because they contain so much of life that it will not fit any one possible pattern. They contain no more of the stuff of life than other imaginative works of the past. There is the same act of selection involved, but the facts selected are such as patently *do not* fit together in any orderly scheme, in any emotional unity—though sometimes a kind of merely literary unity is imposed on this little emotional chaos by the style or temperament of the writer. It is no longer desired that art should be distinguished from the raw material of life by the existence of a pattern in which discrepant elements are ap-

parently reconciled; it differs now from life chiefly in its effort to dramatize and emphasize the irreconcilability of life's incidents. For ordinary life, though less orderly than most fiction, is for most people habitually felt as being more orderly than it is. Fiction now serves to remind us of what we would prefer to forget—it drives in with merciless insistence its reminders of the discontinuity of our experiences, its lack of that beauty which exists only in a relevance of one part to another.

It might seem that our fondness for this kind of imaginative literature was a proof of our psychic health. If we can bear to be reminded of the meaninglessness of our daily lives, if we do not demand reassurance and comfort in neat and orderly story-lives with which we can identify our cluttered and random activities, then we must surely be a robust crew! But it is possible that there is a less flattering and truer explanation.

We have suffered a severe shattering of our ideals. That has happened before in the history of human thought. Old interpretations have been found inadequate, and have been dis-

carded with pain and shame. But mankind has created new ideals for itself, doubtless destined to be discarded in turn some day, but serving the purpose of our human needs for the time. Idealism is in this sense a function of the human mind. When old ideals are broken, we must make ourselves new ideals which—whatever weaknesses they may ultimately be found to have—will at all events meet the test which our old ideals have failed to meet. But—it is hard to drive the sore and wounded human spirit to the task of making workable new ideals! It is easier to nurse our wounds in a corner.

If we can find in the very constitution of life a justification for our reluctance to get back on the job of ideal-making, we shall have a better conscience about our dereliction. We are happy, then, pathetically happy, to find in this new literature of ours some apparently valid excuses for our inaction, in the form of revelations of the wildness and inharmoniousness of life itself and the ridiculousness and futility of seeking a meaning in it. Since any meanings which we impute to this chaos will necessarily

be false, why should we waste our time in manufacturing these illusions and delusions? We should be fools to do so!

What we have done, then, is to foist off our own muddlement upon the universe itself. That this is true may be seen from the characteristic use which has been made in some of our new fiction of the recent scientific explorations of what is called "the unconscious." By enlarging the familiar realm of fiction—conscious thought and action—to include the apparently chaotic jumble and rag-bag of the unconscious, with its dark secrets of Sadism, coprophilia, and perversity in general, new horrors have been added to the fictional pictures of our human existence, and—what is still more to the point—life has been made to seem more hopelessly chaotic and unintelligible. But when we turn from these literary exploitations of the "unconscious" to the scientific explorations of it, we find a marked difference in attitude. The scientific activities of mankind, unlike its imaginative activities, have not suffered from shell-shock; and we do not find the students of the human mind rejoicing in the

chaos of the "unconscious" as an excuse for their failure to form a good working theory of it. On the contrary, we find that the "unconscious" is to them no chaos at all, but a realm in whose apparent disorder they have found a definite kind of order; in fact, they have been enabled by what they have found in the "unconscious" to correlate and explain all sorts of bewildering and painful discrepancies in outward conduct, previously inexplicable; they have created an intelligible and practically demonstrable theoretic unity out of just those aspects of human life which have for fictional and other artistic purposes seemed in the past a hopeless jangle of contradictions. And finally, they actually undertake therapeutically the task of bringing harmony, order and happiness into inharmonious, disorderly and futile lives. The imaginative artist need not be asked to "believe" in this; it may appear as alien to his own tasks as belief or disbelief in the new theory of electrons. But it is significant that such fiction as has undertaken to use these new concepts in the interpretation of life has met with no wide response from the intelligentsia—

while on the contrary such fiction as has enriched its data with mere confusing and terrifying (one might say "bloody and stinking") *disjecta membra* of psycho-analytic research, has had the reward of our enormous applause and admiration. It is evident that we, at this moment in history, do *not* want life to seem capable of being interpreted and understood, because that would be a reproach to us for our own failure to undertake the task of reconstructing our social, political and economic theories, and in general, and in consonance with these, our ideals of a good life.

We wish life to be represented as too much out of joint to be set right by our feeble efforts. And the response which imaginative literature makes to this demand is of various sorts. In certain writings, the effect of chaos is gained by the mere absence of the accustomed "meanings" imputed by us to life. And by way of undermining the vague and pretentious esthetic theories which are sometimes put forward in justification of our tastes in these matters, let us consider a moment the nature of these "meanings" which are now held to be so il-

lusory. In imaginative fiction these meanings seldom if ever refer to anything so far-fetched and elaborate as a social or political theory which might turn out to be mistaken or imperfect. No, these "meanings" actually refer simply to the ordinary social habits into which we have organized our instinctive and physical predilections. These social habits serve to relate our instinctive and physical predilections one to another and give them richer connotations—give them "meaning." It is pleasant to flex one's muscles, but this pleasure is habitually enriched among us—by games involving comradeship and rivalry; by trades and arts involving skill, pride, social approval and ambition; by a social and economic scheme in which such proficiency is a means of gaining the admiration and the love of women, and is generally the means of supporting a chosen woman and her children; and by irregularly recurrent crises involving heroism and self-sacrifice. The flexing of certain muscles thus has connotations with a whole universe of emotions; it is enriched with meaning. In contemporary literature, a descending list might be

arranged, of works illustrating the gradual withdrawal of meaning from representations of human activity, beginning with self-sacrifice, heroism, and painful "duty" generally, going on to the domestic and parental field, including all ordinary responsible aspects of sexual romance, and reaching down finally to the arts and trades; further than this the "disillusionizing" process has not yet gone, the field of boyish sports and comradeships remaining still touched with romantic glamour in all modern stories thus far observed. But it may now be noted that the view of life which sincerely denies validity to almost the whole scheme of civilized life is a view natural enough to what we may call spiritual vagabonds—to those who, whatever their actual position in the worldly scheme of things, have withdrawn from it altogether or in great part their loyalty and belief and consent. This is, then, the latest stage of the "vagabond" view of life.

But before going on to consider the further literary implications of this vagabondage, we might pause for an illustration of the process of withdrawing significance from the details of

life. This significance is temporarily withdrawn for any of us from these details by a temporary shattering of the larger social values of our individual lives—as in an unhappy love-affair—and an incident drawn from this realm of experience will serve to show the method employed in dramatizing the chronic disillusionment of our intellectual vagabonds. A nineteenth-century poet has described how, with the destruction of a belief in their marriage, the embraces of a man and woman lose their old significance and beauty, and dwindle to a mere physical action, trivial in itself and ugly in its lack of meaning:

*"A kiss is but a kiss now! and no wave*
*Of a great flood that whirls me to the sea."*

There is here, however, an endeavor to understate the case for fear of causing shock. A characteristically disillusioned poet of to-day would have no such qualms; and he could achieve his effect by an exact physical description of the act of kissing with all romantic meaning taken out of it. He might content

himself with saying: "A kiss is now but a contact of two mucous membranes." What he would say, in undertaking to state more explicitly the content of those lines of Meredith immediately following, is perhaps best left to the imagination:

> "*But, as you will! we'll sit contentedly*
> *And eat our pot of honey on the grave.*"

It will be seen that there is almost no limit to the possible effect, in brutality and ugliness, of a mere withdrawal of the customary "meaning" from an action which is commonly considered in the light of its organized and civilized values. This trick has only to be played ruthlessly enough, and applied as a method to the description of the actual behavior of people who are themselves acting in the light of "meanings" unmentioned in the description, for it to seem an exposure of the true grotesqueness of life.

But this is not the tramp's worst revenge upon a civilization which he despises. There is a worse, though an easier revenge, which con-

sists in the inverted sentimentality of substituting ugly adjectives for pretty ones in his account of those aspects of life which, as most highly organized and involving most responsibility, he most hates and fears. He may, for example, never mention babies without forcibly recalling in his description the odor of unwashed diapers. His hatred of civilization may even be so general as to be utterly unselective—all sidewalks will be dusty, all lamp-posts crooked, all neighbors cross-eyed or splay-footed, all voices strained or raucous, etc., etc.

Certain sincere protests against civilization take the form of a championship of whatever is instinctive against whatever is "artificial" in life. There is a touching naïveté in these productions, a gallant belief in the ultimate goodness of our human emotions—a belief that courageously accepts all sorts of queer and distorted emotions as splendid, so long as they are genuine. These are essentially idealizations of vagabondage. They really aim at an evaluation of life, a revelation of its beauty and significance, and they fail, in so far as they do fail, only because they have, in reject-

ing civilization as a theme, left themselves for sympathetic treatment only such ragged fringes of life.

We have asked for representations of life as chaos—for the sake of our greater ease—and here are the responses. Who can best represent life as a chaos, and win the wreaths we have to offer? He who, digging most deeply into the mind's secrets, can bring to light most candidly the confusing and alarming treasures of the "unconscious"? So it would seem. But what are these treasures? Our infantile tendencies to cruelty, our infantile coprophilias, our infantile perversities. It is, then, in an uncensored *infantile* view of life that we find the most convincing excuse for our adult failures to cope with the world. Or, if not there, we may finally find it in the honest homosexual view of life—that sincerely tragic point of view from which all those institutions and efforts and romantic hopes and ideals which center about heterosexual love *are* utterly meaningless. Our Tramp's Progress leads ultimately to this.

Meanwhile, what has been the effect of the

Russian Revolution upon the intelligentsia? After a brief enthusiasm, the intelligentsia has for the most part become indifferent to the new order in Russia—an indifference which masks a secret temperamental antipathy. The Russian experiment is finding an easier sympathy and understanding among bankers, politicians, and intelligent business men generally than among this rebellious class. The reason for such an antipathy lies in the fact that the Bolsheviks are actually imposing order upon chaos —an order all too much resembling, in its governmental and industrial paraphernalia, and in its rigorous concepts of "duty," that order against which the intelligentsia is still in hopeless rebellion at home. The introduction of machinery into Russia, and eventually throughout Asia, is not the sort of change to warm our hearts. . . . Far from it. The American intelligentsia has a deep sentimental attachment to barbarism and savagery, preferably of a nomadic sort.

The only possible effect which the Russian Revolution could have upon the American intelligentsia would be in the nature of a final

disillusionment concerning its fundamental belief, the one which has remained when everything else was shattered—the vagabond's belief in his "freedom." The Russian experience would show us that "freedom" is merely a bourgeois myth. It would set up in place of "freedom" certain definite and realizable goods, of a not unfamiliar sort, and it would teach us that these are to be achieved by organized social activities involving all of the customary personal virtues, including such dull matters as honesty, sobriety, responsibility, and even a sense of duty. On the other hand, it would offer us the possibility, in the nature at present of a religious hope, of shaping the whole world nearer to the heart's desire. It is obvious that these chastened and sober notions of Revolution can make no real appeal to a typical member of the present-day intelligentsia. If he had to make himself over into what is to almost all intents and purposes a good American business man, he would prefer to enjoy the American business man's rewards.

The tame Bolshevik acceptance of the concept of "duties" is peculiarly irksome to the

American intelligentsia. This is not so much because that word might be used to embrace absurd and evil actions, as so often it has been in the past, as because the very mention of duties of any sort is offensive to a class which is well enough aware at heart of its own present dereliction from that duty, upon the performance of which its very existence as a class is historically and socially founded, and to the more or less faithful performance of which it owes the peculiar respect and privileges that it possesses: that is, the mere familiar duty of interpreting life, as conditions change, for those who are too busy with more material tasks to do it as well for themselves: the duty of explaining life in terms of the arts (or of discovering the artistic achievements in which life is thus dealt with and calling attention to them) so as to make living more comprehensible and more enjoyable in its widest sense. That task is being left more and more to the movies, the comic strips, and a literature which undertakes only to solace its audiences with simple wish-fulfillments of a quasi-infantile nature. It is not for a moment imagined that

the favorite literature of the intelligentsia is acceptable pabulum for the masses. It is for ourselves only—as the masses find out soon enough when they wistfully sample it. Meanwhile, an actual social relation, however ignored and repudiated by ourselves in our helplessness, does persist between ourselves as a class and the masses, which in its most striking aspect may be described in an old phrase: the hungry sheep look up and are not fed. One possible way of meeting this situation is, of course, to assure the hungry ones that they are getting all they need out of Charlie Chaplin, Bugs Baer, jazz, and the seven lively arts in general. In one sense this is not untrue, for their seven lively arts are in a healthier state than most of ours, and those who have Paul Whiteman need not envy us our James Joyce!

But it seems more than possible that a younger generation of sensitive and creative-minded men and women will take themselves and their responsibilities more seriously and at the same time more joyously. Before it proceeds to the reconstruction of such shattered social, political and economic ideals as we have

left them, or as a preliminary part of that process, it may well feel called upon to liquidate the liberal-and-radical "freedom" movement which has so obviously reached the point of bankruptcy. It has, to trifle with the metaphor for a moment, some slight assets in the shape of tangible social achievements; these, at their actual value, can be set off against the enormous obligations incurred, and the deficit charged up against experience. It may not be impossible for such a younger generation to begin to formulate and erect into socially acceptable *conventions*, and where possible into laws, some healthy modern ideals of courtship, marriage, divorce, and the relations of the sexes in general. It may not be so difficult for them to find the political terms upon which they can accept and serve and use a machine civilization. It may be quite natural for them to think of the arts as means of communication rather than merely opportunities for irresponsible self-expression. And their chosen literature is, in that event, likely to be a literature which, among other things, will help them to love generously, to work honestly, to think

clearly, to fight bravely, to live nobly. . . . These may seem queer words for one of this vagabond generation of the intelligentsia to use without a smile. But let them stand. We are having our day, and making such use of it as we can. But it is a poor pupil who cannot better his master!

THE END

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Intellectual vagabondage

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